The Dissertation Committee for Bhavya Tiwari Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Beyond English: Translating Modernism in the Global South

Committee:

Elizabeth Richmond-Garza, Supervisor

David Damrosch

Martha Ann Selby

Cesar Salgado

Hannah Wojciehowski

Beyond English: Translating Modernism in the Global South

by

Bhavya Tiwari, M.A.

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Dedication

~ For my mother ~

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Beyond English: Translating Modernism in the Global South

Bhavya Tiwari, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Elizabeth Richmond-Garza

My title echoes Agha Shahid Ali's sentiment of needing to move beyond the linguistic nationalism of "English" toward a more varied understanding of Anglophone writing within multiple contexts in the world. In three theoretical case studies from four linguistic and literary traditions (English, Bengali, Spanish, and Hindi-Urdu), I explore the dimensions and definitions of comparative Anglophone and world literature, comparative poetics, and a comparative study of novels – in the global postcolonial world. I focus on moments of translatability and untranslatability to question traditional models for studies in English and comparative literature that do not account for translation. Each of my chapters shows how texts in the "original" or "translation" do not always circulate from a homogenized metropolitan center to a marginalized periphery, and unlike in the elite North American and Parisian world where untranslatability often inspires terror and loss of language, translations can act as connecting forces that create organic dialogue in the global south on modernism and postcolonial discourses that go beyond Europe and America.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

No language is old—or young—beyond English.
So what of a common tongue beyond English?

I know some words for war, all of them sharp,
but the sharpest one is *jung*—beyond English!…

Go all the way through jungle from *aleph* to *zenith*
to see English, like monkeys, swung beyond English.

So never send to know for whom the bell tolled,
for across the earth it has rung beyond English (Ali 68-9).

The above couplets from Agha Shahid Ali's "Beyond English" ask us to look beyond English. The emphasis is on unspoken verbs (such as, look, hear, smell, see, touch, analyze, compare, etc.,) that could precede the preposition "beyond" followed by the noun "English." But the declarative opening statement: "No language is old—or young—beyond English" undermines the impossibility of a common tongue beyond English. The rhetorical question that follows the declarative statement – "So what of a common tongue beyond English?" – is rendered ineffective in the next couplet. The subjective voice declares in a confident tone the knowledge of "some words for war, all of them sharp," and the sharpest among them is "*jung*," which is beyond English!" "*Jung*" meaning "war" in Urdu is, as the speaker tells us, untranslatable and incomprehensible for those who cannot go beyond English. My dissertation echoes Agha Shahid Ali's sentiment of needing to move beyond the linguistic nationalism of "English" toward a more varied understanding of modern Anglophone writing within multiple contexts in the

world. For this, I take the verbs – "compare" and "analyze" – to understand "untranslatability" and "translatability" as necessary global and local tools.

In the couplets quoted above, Agha Shahid Ali asks us to look beyond English by taking particular cases in point. He suggests a journey through the Borgesian labyrinth to gaze at English "swung beyond English" or at an Aleph point in time and space, where the tolling of the bell goes beyond dead poets such as John Donne or Thomas Gray. My dissertation, too, takes case in point to showcase not only English swung beyond English but comparative literature swung beyond Europe as it evolves into world literary studies. I pursue this task by focusing on moments of translatability and untranslatability from the global south in order to question traditional models for studies in English and comparative literature that do not sufficiently account for translation.

Each of my chapters shows how texts in the "original" or "translation" do not always circulate from a homogenized metropolitan center to a marginalized periphery, and thus they move beyond Franco Moretti's and Pascal Casanova's scholarship on the "world" in world literature. Further, as I show in this project, unlike the untranslatability in the elite North American and Parisian world that often inspires terror and loss of language, translatability and translations can act as connecting forces that create organic dialogue in the global south on modernism and postcolonial discourses that go beyond Europe and America. In three theoretical case studies from four linguistic and literary traditions (English, Bengali, Spanish, and Hindi-Urdu), I explore the dimensions and definitions of comparative world literature, comparative poetics, and a comparative study

of novels – in the global postcolonial modern world that go both through and beyond English.

The choice of texts

My three case studies – comparative world literature, comparative poetics, and comparative modernist novel – analyze an archive of modern texts in prose and poetry in the original and in translation. I take translatability and untranslatability as my methodological tools to put literary texts in conversation with each other. The case studies do not just reflect on a text's afterlife, but also explore what happens *before* it experiences loss or gain in translation. The archive of texts and authors in this dissertation echoes my personal taste, but is also an extension of the larger disciplinary debates on comparative literature. Recently, scholars of comparative literature have had recourse to modern texts in formulating and revising its paradigms as it transforms into global studies.

This is probably because modernism was always a global movement. As Elleke Boehmer tells us in her "How to Feel Global, the Modern, the Global and the World"::

> Modernism may be one of the few movements or approaches in the arts that can take the qualifier of the global without conceptual jarring, that is to say, that permits a shift from the still-dominant axes of temporality that shape inter-textual literary work, to spatial and horizontal axes of comparison. Whether its paradigmatic moves are charted in Paris in 1857, Beijing in 1921, or somewhere

> far earlier in time, say in Granada in 1489, its tendencies have always been cross-border, fluid, hybridizing, defamiliarizing, interactive (599).

Over the course of the past decade, Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti, David Damrosch, Emily Apter, Sandra Bermann, and Michael Wood have all published major work on translation, world literature, and the discipline of comparative literature. Sometimes sharp debates have been carried out concerning the politics of world literary study and issues of aesthetics and the possibilities for translation. A continuous vein of inquiry in these debates is stimulated by the tension between the local and the global. But more strikingly than anything else, according to Jessica Berman, in these debates is the crucial role modernism plays in re-examination of comparative literature. In fact, she says, "modernism seems at the heart of the new comparative literature in a way not seen since the final chapter of Erich Auerbach's foundational text, *Mimesis*" (Berman 54-5).

In her "World Modernisms, World Literature, and Comparativity," Susan Stanford Friedman sees a parallel between the efforts to globalize modernist studies and revitalize world literature. Like globalizing of modernist studies, Friedman writes, new approaches to world literature and comparative literature often begin "in a critique of the Eurocentricism of *Weltliteratur* in its theory and practice" (501). The problem with world literature, she tells us, is that it has not been sufficently global and has only replicated "the imperial powers of the West." The new wave to move beyond the Western literature, thus, often works in two frameworks – the center/periphery model from the world-sytems theory and/or the circulation model based on the traveling of cultures and texts. Although

cosmopolitan internationalism is nothing new to modernist studies, it, too, has been caught up in the colonial model of locating of sites of modernist centers in the Western metropole (500).

Certainly the intersection of comparative literature with modernist studies says something about the relationship between the two paradigms and ideologies. I argue, via the texts and authors chosen in this project, that translation is the connective tissue that necessitates this collaborative intersection. Modernism as a literary movement has always been connected with internationalism and transnational studies. The present impetuous to globalize comparative literature hinges on internationalizing the discipline beyond Europe, a process that is only possible via translations. Modernist literature, as scholars like Steven G. Yao argue, heavily relied on translation as a literary mode. The sheer "abundance of translations" produced during the period gives concrete evidence of modernist writers' interests in foreign cultures and languages (Yao 5). Further, many modernist texts demand translation in the very act of reading. Thus, if the present task of comparative literature is to evolve into world literary studies, an international and global movement such as modernism gives a particularly valuable area to explore.

Yet as we know, despite all its internationalism, modernism was also a very local literary movement. The words "modern," "modernity," and "modernism" have inspired varied debates locally and globally, so much so that Susan Stanford Friedman in her "Definitional Excursions" in *Disciplining Modernism* says, "I have no expectations, therefore, of determining or discovering a fixed meaning for terms like *modern*,

modernity, modernism. I expect differences" (16). Supriya Chaudhuri in her "Translation and World Literature" says that modernist literature "may be regarded as simultaneously local and international, elitist and democratic" (594). She observes that translation played an important role in the global spread of modernism and also in its local flowerings. By focusing on vernacular modernisms in India between the 1920s and 1960s she shows in her article that the impact of translation was by no means unidirectional or targeted towards the west. Translation, as she tells us, from both European and non-European languages was an indispensable element in the climate of Indian modernist writing. A similar trend can be seen in Latin America. In *From Modernism to Neobaroque,* Cesar Salgado examines modernism as a literary movement that was transmitted to Latin American authors via translations of texts such as *Ulysses* to produce a postcolonial world aesthetic, and this phenomenon was not an uncritical blind reception of European modernsts. My project builds upon these conversations. It puts Latin America and South Asia in conversation with each other via translations and circulations of modern texts to create a south-south dialogue, in which Europe takes on a peripheral role.

Comparative modernism in the global south

In his *Transnational Poetics*, Jahan Ramazani says that the authors of the global south are often analyzed as postcolonial subjects and hence overlooked as modernists. Conceived as a literary response to the anonymity, stress, and speed of modern life, modernism is usually attributed to First World cities from London and Dublin to New

York and Chicago (Ramazani 117). Further, the colonial outposts of the European empires are often represented as nothing but sites that "adventurous poets and artists are seen as importing primitive or exotic materials to shore up the ruins" (117). Additionally, the peculiar association of modernism with "making it new" in style, form, and content doesn't necessarily apply to postcolonial authors who are already sufficiently alien because of their spatial and temporal positions diachronically and synchronically. And yet as Simon Gikandi says in his article "Preface: Modernism in the World," "a convergence of political and literary ideologies mark a significant part of the history of modernism and postcolonialism" (471). According to him the paradox is that "without modernism, postcolonial literature as we know it would perhaps not exist" (421). Although eliding the differences between postcolonialism and modernism or looking at one as the precursor of the other is bound to induce anxiety, examining a cross-hemispheric and transnational intersections via translations, translatability and untranslatability of modern authors enriches our reading of postcolonial and modernist discourses locally and globally.

Indeed, the importance of translations, translatability and untranslatability come very well into the question of modernisms in the plural, since modernism was always an international and interlingual movement even within Europe. To think about it globally, we get into a heightened issue of translation of modernist language, impressed with the issues of race, gender, colonial, reception, and the circulation history of texts. Further, by emphasizing the connections between modernists authors in the global south, we look

beyond simple one-directional moves from Europe to "the periphery," and trace richer networks crossing through but also beyond the old imperial trade routes. The three chapters that follow take into account the translational history of modern authors such as Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), Mahadevi Varma (1907-1987), James Joyce (1882-1941), Raja Rao (1908-2006), G. V. Desani (1909-2000), and Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) to juxtapose them with each other. This juxtaposition, sometimes of disparate authors and poets, in translation and in the original, enriches the ongoing dialogue on modernism and postcolonial writing from the global south. It also emphasizes the need for a comparative literary that is sensitive in examining the meaning of translatability and untranslatability locally and globally.

Thus, for instance, my first chapter examines Rabindranath Tagore's self-translation of his Bengali poem cycle *Gitanjali* into Edwardian English. By critically assessing the role played by American and European authors, such as Ezra Pound and W.B. Yeats, I demonstrate their contribution in Tagore's transformation and later demise as a national and a world poet. The second chapter juxtaposes English translations of Chile's Gabriela Mistral and India's Mahadevi Varma's poetry to assess how the images their translators created fostered an ambiguous afterlife of the two poets in both local and global literary systems. The chapter concludes by pointing out ways race and gender influence literary reception and reading of women writers at home and abroad. The final chapter considers translation as a metaphor to connect James Joyce, Jorge Luis Borges, Raja Rao, and G.V. Desani to examine postcolonial modernity as a global phenomenon. I

use this discussion to point out methods to more successfully expand the world literary canon than the often limited, assimilative or exoticizing strategies commonly used during the past century. I conclude by proposing ways to develop translation and translation theory beyond the traditional postcolonial geography and the emphasis on modernist centers, in order to use comparative study of global Englishes and their non-Anglophone interlocutors. In this respect, my project becomes an inaugural step in examining and moving beyond what Revathi Krishnaswamy has nicely called a "world lit without a world lit crit" (399) phenomenon in the global-local contexts.

Comparative world literature

My three case studies center around the philosophy of conceptualizing a comparative literature that is local and global. I take "translatability" and "untranslatability" to accomplish this task. I show this by taking Tagore's idea of "vishwa sahitya" or world literature instead of Goethe's *weltliteratur*. Like Goethe's paradigm of Weltliteratur, rooted in Germany's historical and political ethos of the 1820s and 1830s, Tagore's concept of "vishwa sahitya" also stems from the political realities of his times. When Goethe began addressing the issue of *Weltliteratur*, Germany was not a politically unified country, and he saw in literature the universal elements that could bring nations and communities together. Similarly, when asked to deliver a lecture in 1907 at the inauguration of National Council of Education, whose function was to provide a channel for modern education outside the curricula and system shaped by

British interests, Tagore launched the idea of "vishwa sahitya" or "world literature" to combat the petty provincialism of regional literatures in multilingual India.

Unlike Goethe, who had envisioned Germans playing an integral role in the era of *weltliteratur*, Tagore did not see literature as belonging to a particular nation, race, or time, but only to be understood as the product of humanity of all time seeking expression. In fact, when asked to deliver a lecture on Comparative Literature to the Indian National Council of Education[1] in February 1907 in Calcutta, Tagore opted to *translate* comparative literature as "vishwa sahitya." In his speech to the Council, Tagore launched the idea of Comparative Literature as World Literature by saying: "I have been called upon to discuss a subject to which you have given the English name of Comparative Literature. Let me call it World-Literature in Bengali" (qtd. in "Comparative Literature in India" 3)[2]. Tagore's decision to deliberately mistranslate "comparative literature" as "world literature" rings bell with the frustrations scholars have in defining what comparative literature stands for and does. I tackle these questions by chiseling three theoretical models on comparative world studies from the modern global south.

Through these studies, I take up fundamental questions raised by Susan Bassnett and Djelal Kadir on the philosophy of our discipline. In his essay "To World, to Globalize—Comparative Literature's Crossroads," Kadir says that what is accomplished

[1] The National Council of Education aimed to destabilize the intention of the Governor General of British India to divorce wealthy Indians from their native traditions through English education.

[2] Translated by Buddhadev Bose.

and achieved in the name of comparative literature takes supremacy over its definition. He argues that "Comparative literature is neither a subject, nor an object, nor is it a problem. Comparative literature is a practice. It is what its practitioners do. These practitioners are subjects, they objectify their material, and their practices may well be problematic" (1). But above all, according to Kadir, "comparative literature is defined not by a corpus, a subject matter, an object, or an immutable set of problems. Rather, comparative literature takes on its significance by what is done in its name and by how those practices become ascertained, instituted, and managed" (1).

Unlike Susan Bassnett who says in her *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993) that sooner or later "anyone who claims to be working in comparative literature has to try and answer the inevitable question: What is it?" (1), for Kadir it is "what is done in its name" that takes precedence. The emphasis here is on the verb rather than the noun. Theoretically, my project engages with crisis-like questions that are anxiogenic but form the foundation of our metadiscipline. Taking just not Kadir's "what is done in its name," but also Basnett's "what is it?" into account, I respond to these questions by analyzing case studies to interrogate three theoretical models as possible answers to these questions. By taking the word "comparability" of comparative literature not in the traditional sense of seeking "similarities," "differences," "imitation," "influence," and "reception," but in the ability of literary texts to inspire what Walter Benjamin called "translatability" and "untranslatability" in local and global systems, I

seek to showcase possibilities for understanding a global comparative literature with roots in their own originals and in eventual transnational translations.

Translation

To define "translation," "translatability," or "untranslatability" is not an easy task, one that inevitably demands scholarly and linguistic comparison. André Lefevere calls translation a rewriting in *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992). The Indian critic Sujit Mukherjee sees translation as a new writing and discovery in his *Translation as Discovery and Other Essays on Indian Literature in English Translation* (1981). Suzane Jill Levine's *The Subversive Scribe* (2009) focuses on translation as a creative act, resulting from the association between writers and their translators-cum-writers, between "original" and "translated" texts. I follow Samuel Weber in looking at "translations" and "originals" as *instances* in time and space of a text's life and afterlife in literary systems. In his "A Touch of Translation: On Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator,"" Weber says that translation just doesn't involve movement from one language to another or one sensibility from another, "but from one instance" to another (67). This movement from one instance to another and one language to the other reflects a tension between the general linguistic/literary systems and individual cases. I extend the concept of instances to even "originals" themselves, so as to look at them and their translations neither as precursors nor successors of each other, but as instances of what Walter Benjamin called the kinship between languages.

When looked at as instances, translations and originals acquire cultural and linguistic meaning diachronically and synchronically in the postcolonial modern world. In most South Asian languages there isn't an exact translation of the English word "translation." In Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu "translation" is "rupantar," "anuvad," and "tarjuma" respectively, meaning "change in the form," "speaking after," and "interpretation." In colonial contexts in South America, translation has often been synonymous with an act of betrayal, as in the famous figure of La Malinche, the Nahautl and Mayan-speaking woman who became the interpreter for Hernán Cortés, and who participated in the negotiations that led to the European conquest of the Aztec empire. The meaning of the word "translation" is thus dependent on geographical, cultural, linguistic and historical contexts. It is, indeed, an instance of rewriting, a change in form, a rediscovery of an interpretation, and therefore a betrayal of the "original" diachronically and synchronically. Thus, in the following chapters, an engagement with the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Mahadevi Varma, Gabriela Mistral, James Joyce, Raja Rao, Jorge Luis Borges, and G.V. Desani showcases translation as an *instance* in time and space in order to understand a text in local and global literary circulation.

The act of engagement with a text's life or afterlife in the local and global literary systems becomes important for a comparatist attuned to the needs of the discipline mainly because "originals" and "translations" can open up "the unavoidable complexities, the historically ingrained problems and prejudices, and the intense day-to-day negotiations that occupy our global communities" (Bermann 2). Moreover, for a

comparative literature that can no longer remain confined to a few European languages, regardless of where one is located on the globe, all readings become acts of translational instances, as we will see in the three case studies addressed in this project.

Translation, then, as Simon Gikandi points out in his "Contested Grammar," is a way out of the "prison house of Eurocentrism." Still, as this project shows, no matter how good that Benjaminian intention might be, there is also *that* legitimate question that we cannot avoid: "Can the translation of texts and traditions from non-European languages open up the space of comparative literature or is it always a temporary detour that always returns us to the same?" (Gikandi 256). The challenge to produce a comparative literature that engages seriously with the languages and the literatures of the global south has to engage with Spivak's concern in *Death of a Discipline* (2003) of reading the global south "with linguistic rigor and historic savvy" (5). Hence, one of the aims of this project is to show that translation can become a tool to move beyond the problematic Eurocentrism of comparative literature by critically reading the global south in conversation with the canonical *other*. In order to do accomplish this task I have taken up "translatability" and "untranslatability" as fundamental tools to theorize the narrative arc in the three case studies that follow.

Translatability and untranslatability

The words "translatability" and "untranslatability" inevitably evoke Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" (1923). Written in a highly philosophical and

esoteric language, Walter Benjamin's essay announces translation as a "mode" that has nothing to do with the original. In fact, it is the original that is closer to the translated, and not vice versa. Nevertheless, to comprehend translation as a mode, Benjamin suggests that his readers should "go back to the original, for it contains the law governing the translation: its translatability" (70). Translatability then is not a characteristic of the "translated" text but only of the "original." Benjamin describes translatability as "an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability" (71). Translatability, as I take from this and as I show in the cases of Tagore, Mistral, Varma, and Joyce, is a *manifestation* of a *particular aspect* of the "original" in an instance. This is not to say that untranslatability is the absence of that manifestation in "translation." As Benjamin reminds us in the essay, the untranslatability of a text sometimes results from the absence of a translator in a text's life cycle.

In "The Task of the Translator" translatability and untranslatability work together to create a natural connection between the "original" and the "translation." But in no way is this connection hierarchized or binarized as the Saidian "self" imposing itself on the "other." This is because, according to Benjamin, "translation issues from the original not so much for its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stag of continues life" (71). Translatability then is a potential of the work itself, but it also falls in the category of

untranslatability. Because even "if men should prove unable to translate" certain works, translation should be carried out (70). Benjamin transforms translation into an important artistic activity by deconstructing words such as "resemblance," and "fidelity," that are generally associated with translation theories with respect to the original. In fact, according to Carol Jacob's "The Monstrosity of Translation: Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator,"" Benjamin's essay performs a "translation of translation," which demands "violent translation of every term promising the key to its definition" that results in dislocating any definition (90-1). In a proto-Derridian style, for Benjamin, translation becomes a play which has no center or origin because the relationship between the signifier (the original) and the signified (the translated) is deferred forever. Further, Benjamin begins his hermeneutics of translation by proposing a very intelligent move: that any form of art is free from its receivers, and exists for itself, hence translation is not a matter of conveying the sense that a work would have had for its original audience. The first few paragraphs of the essay establish art as an auto-organic system existing for itself:

> In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. Not only is any reference to a certain public or its representatives misleading, but even the concept of an "ideal" receiver is detrimental in the theoretical consideration of art…No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener.

> Is a translation meant for readers who do not understand the original?...If the original does not exist for the reader's sake, how could the translation be understood on the basis of this premise? (69-70).

Thus, by uprooting art from its immediate ecology, translation for Benjamin, acquires a life of its own. It becomes an artistic mode, whose laws are inherent in the original, called "translatability." The original survives because of continuous translations, made possible because of a text's untranslatability that gives new avatars to the original. In a very peculiar way then the original and the translated text engender production, destruction, and reproduction of each other in tandem because of relationship between translatability and untranslatability.

For Emily Apter, however, untranslatability and translatability become a source of both joy and pain, hope and hopelessness. In *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013), she advances untranslatability as a "deflationary gesture toward the expansionism and gargantuan scale of world-literary endeavors" (3). She says that the aim of her book is to:

> activate untranslatability as a theoretical fulcrum of comparative literature with bearing on approaches to world literatures, literary world-systems and literary history, the politics of periodization, the translation of philosophy and theory. . . the poetics of translational difference, as well as ethical, cosmological and theological dimensions of worldliness (4).

Like Benjamin, Apter does not explicitly define "untranslatability," or even "translatability" for that matter. Nevertheless she states the central thesis of her work as unfolding the problematics of "an approach to literary comparatism that recognizes the importance of non-translation, mistranslation, incomparability, and untranslatability" (4). Thus, by negating what *could* stand for translation, comparisons, and translatability, Apter's book uses what stands for "untranslatability" as an "epistemological fulcrum for rethinking philosophical concepts and discourses of the humanities" (31). Perhaps, for her, anything that remains untouched in some pristine "original" form in time and space, locally and globally, is the unstranslatable.

According to Apter, translation opens up "questions of how to teach literature in the humanities now, especially when there is a need to ford the divisions between World Literature and Theory that have led to unproductive rifts" (5). But she proposes that both translation studies and world literature falsely extend the promise of "worldly criticism," as both are unable "to rework literary history through planetary cartographies and temporalities despite their recourse to world-systems theory" (8). Further, Apter accuses "translation studies and World Literature" to have ignored their internal theoretical problems. With translation, according to her, assumed as a "good thing," enabling communication across languages and cultures has blindsided the right to the "Unstranslatable" and has adulterated the very core of world literature. Her book, as she tells us, has thus "involved an effort to relate linguistic pluralism (inherent in translation as a liberal art) to a practice of *Weltliteratur* that takes full measure of linguistic

constraints and truth conditions in the investigation of singular modes of existing in the world's languages" (27).

Although Apter's *Against World Literature* claims to rescue comparative literature and languages from world literature by pointing out untranslatables, it fails to produce any case-sensitive and site-specific literary examples. She concludes her book by saying: "I have tried to wean World Literature from its comfort zone – its ready promotion of identifying over differing and its curiously impassive treatment of "world" and anemic planetary politics – by pressing on what a world is, philosophically, theologically and politically" (335). The near-total absence of literary texts in her book takes us away the "literature" in world literature. Her examples are hardly literary, and the ones that are used, such as *Madam Bovery* come from the elite Parisian and North American world she wishes to negate. Further, the concepts of translatability and untranslatability seem to fall in the binarized camp of affirmations and negations as that which exists and that which doesn't in English. Ending her book with an apocalyptic vision of "thanotropic projections of how a planet dies" (342), Apter leaves us with an unfortunate image of the planet dying because of untranslatable abstractions.

By contrast, my project takes a case-sensitive and site-specific approach to showcase translatability and untranslatability rooted in local and global political aesthetics from the global south. The two terms are abstract only when we speak generally of a situation. I look at translatability and untranslatability as grounded terms in cultural and literary systems, and suggest assessing the poetics of two genres – the lyric

and the novel. Unlike Apter, I use translatability and untranslatability as concepts to define the task of a comparatist at this time of change in the philosophy of our discipline which prompts us to be very worldly but also very local. My three chapters focus on the semantic and structural functioning of a language in a literary text *after* it begins an afterlife in a new setting. At the same time, my project also focuses on factors that impress the text *before* it begins its journey in a foreign language. Thus, I look at translatability and untranslatability as circulation and manifestation in local and global literary systems. It is the circulation of texts or manifestations in "translation" or in the "original" as instances – whether in European or non-European linguistic and literary systems –that carry a world that opens up for investigations power-relations, gender-dynamics, history, circulation, the colonial past, and contemporary political frameworks.

By no means, however, do I mean manifestation or circulation of an "original" in a "translation." For me, all "originals" are writerly texts, demanding "translations" that can only strive for a perfect interpretation, but can never reach it. Translatability and untranslatability are, hence, not what is "translated" and what remains "untranslated," but rather how an "original" is being read, regardless of whether it was ever translated, locally and globally. Thus, as I show in my chapters, translatability is not so much about the finished product but about the very *act* of translation that stems from reading. Similarly, translatability and untranslatability are not polar opposites. They are interdependent. In fact, it is the untranslatability that is inherent in all texts that inspires

translatability. Untranslatability is, thus, the nucleus that radiates and demands the translatability of texts.

My arguments, thus, echo terms familiar from recent work on global circulation and translation of literature by North American scholars, such as André Lefevere and David Damrosch as well as Emily Apter, who envision a new ethos of comparative literature in world literary studies. Simultaneously, the scholarly and creative work of Buddhadeb Bose and Rabindranath Tagore on translation from multilingual South Asia gives me the imaginative leap to chisel new theoretical models of the global comparative literature "from below."

The three chapters that follow take up Rabindranath Tagore's creative self-(mis)translation of his poetic collection *Gitanjali* (1912) from Bengali into English, and its Spanish reception in Latin America, the Spanish poems of Gabriela Mistral and Mahadevi Varma's Hindi poems in local and global literary systems, and finally the translational reception history of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) in Latin America and South Asia, in light of Jessica Berman's comparative modernist studies, Mariano Siskind's model for the globalization of the novel and novelization of the globe and Franco Moretti's work on the novel as an epic genre. My conclusion takes Emily Apter's *Against World Literature: The Politics of Untranslatability* (2013) as a departure point to suggest the reverse of her argument. When grounded in cultural, political, and literary moments, "translatability" and "untranslatability" are effective comparative tools to study instances that showcase the methodology for a global comparative literature, not only with literary texts but also in literary theory, locally and globally.

The narrative arc via translatability and untranslatability

Keeping in mind the Benjaminian context of life and death, untranslatability and translatability, I argue in my first chapter that Tagore's *Gitanjali* is a case in point to analyze the gain and loss of "(un)translatability" in the local and global systems, and to guage this concept's significance to the new global comparative literature. Here I look at translatability as a political and creative act that brings a new poetic form, the prose-poem, into Bengali, delineates Tagore's ideas on translation, revives the work of medieval Hindi poet Kabir, and fulfils Tagore's wish of going beyond the Ganges by becoming a living example of his "vishwa sahitya" or "world literature." This concept that he launched in 1907 is fundamental for understanding the ethos of a comparative literature whose foundation is just not in the original but also in translation. The chapter concludes by showing that *Gitanjali* was Tagore's culmination of his genius as a poet and critic, and for the global comparative literature there is more to learn from the various translatability of *Gitanjali* than to lament a loss that never occurred to the original language. In fact, the English *Gitanjali* took Tagore beyond places he could have ever imagined, not just in Europe, which was relatively accessible due to colonial rule, but to countries like Argentina, Mexico, and Chile in the global south. Tagore's case is thus not a warning but a case to study (un)translatability and its multiple registers for the new comparatists who are often torn between the discipline's local and global needs. If world literary studies, as some suggest, is the ultimate trajectory comparative literature will take, then we have a lot to learn from Tagore, as we explore *Gitanjali*'s fate locally and

globally, the politics and intentions of Tagore's self-translatability, and his strategic deployment of "vishwa sahitya."

The second chapter builds upon its predecessor by considering the possibilities for a comparative poetics based on the principle of understanding and analyzing the registers of translatability and untranslatability, created by translators, critics, and poets themselves, to analyze poetry in translation in the local and global frameworks. Instead of looking at translatability as an intrinsic quality of a particular text, as Benjamin would say, this chapter looks at translatability as a relational category and worldly concept, dependent on the linguistic act that the reader and translator think or imagine the text to be imitating. These "imaginary" linguistic acts refer the translator or reader to cultural and literary significations to mould translatability and untranslatability in the global and local traditions. The chapter explores this dynamic by juxtaposing the evolving translational history of the poems of Gabriela Mistral and Mahadevi Varma in English. Juxtaposing the "translatability" of the two authors, one globally renowned and the other not, complicates what constitutes (un)translatability in "local" and "global" literary systems in terms of gender, race, genre, translation, and international movements. Further, juxtaposing the translatability of two diverse poets who share no common linguistic or literary affiliations caters to the spirit of a globalized comparative literature, which is simultaneously local and global. The chapter concludes by suggesting that a comparative poetics of (un)translatability requires the reader to be as sensitive toward the target language as to the source language, and opens comparative avenues to different

poetic traditions of the world in translation, creating dynamism in literary canons in the spirit of Tagore's "vishwa sahitya."

If new avenues of poetic comparison and cultural analysis open up when we juxtapose less-translated poets with often-translated ones in languages other than English, my third chapter takes up the case of novels. In *The Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Márquez*, Franco Moretti calls modernist novels like *Ulysses* or *Midnight's Children* "world texts" that are monumental but "semi-failed" and virtually unreadable books, but ones which the scholarly community has successfully managed to create an obligation to study in the literary system. For him, this obligation to read these virtually unreadable "world texts" is a strategy to compensate for what these texts are lacking – self-sufficiency (5). I argue in this chapter that what makes these world texts unreadable or insufficient as a whole is their inherent (un)translatability that renders these texts sufficiently at home abroad but also sufficiently alien to have a real impact in a foreign system. This dual functionality, when taken as a mode of reading, can help us to move beyond the circuits of postcolonial geography, thereby resisting what Emily Apter in *The Translation Zone* has called a "transnationally translatable monoculture," and helping us to arrive at a new comparability of comparative literature. In order to elaborate and concretize my argument, I have taken the case of James Joyce: a global figure, hovering between modernist and post-modernist aesthetics, an intriguing colonial/postcolonial writer, polyglot, and avid supporter of translation, but a writer whose own work presents severe challenges to translation as a practice and theory. Yet

Joyce's work has had a major role in establishing connections in local and global frameworks. Thus, this chapter takes up Joyce and Joycean aesthetics to create literary dialogue between South Asia and Latin America by exploring the relevance of Joyce's (un)translatability for modernist and postcolonial writers from the global south. My intentions in this chapter are not to show some sort of universal literary paradigm originating in Europe and diffusing in the periphery. For me, Joyce is as much from the periphery as someone like Raja Rao, G.V. Desani, or Borges, and reading the (un)translatability of such authors reveals a network of related yet localized aesthetics in and across literary systems.

A close analysis of Joyce's reception and translation can expose the role that literary works, especially novels, play in the production and reproduction of the discourse of globalization with a cultural difference. Further, texts from India such as Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) and G. V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), which stretch and invent language, contrast sharply with Borges' dislike for word-play and neologism, though they harmonize in turn with the boom and post-boom authors like Miguel Angel Asturias, Julio Cortázar, Juan Rulfo, Guillermo Cabrera Infante or José María Arguedas, all of whom were greatly impressed with James Joyce.

The project concludes by pointing out that a complex web of connection and dissociation between authors and poets in "translation" and in "the original" can take us back to Shahid Ali's poem. By comparatively studying different kinds of translatability and untranslatability in the global south we can perhaps find:

“for whom the bell tolled,/for across the earth it has rung beyond English.”

Chapter 2 Comparative World Literature: Tagore's *Gitanjali* and *Vishwa Sahitya*[3]

"Who are you, reader, reading my poems an hundred years hence?
I cannot send you one single flower from this wreath of the spring,
one single streak of gold from yonder clouds.
Open your doors and look abroad.
From your blossoming garden gather fragrant memories of the
vanished flowers if an hundred years before.
In the joy of your heart may you feel the living joy that sang one
spring morning, sending its glad voice across an hundred years" (*The Gardnener* 125).

In *The Translation Zone*, Emily Apter says that the theory of translation has always "had to confront the problem of whether it best serves the ends of perpetuating cultural memory or advancing its effacement. A good translation, as Walter Benjamin famously argued, makes possible the afterlife of the original by jumping the line between the death of the source language and its futural transference to a target" (4). A translation thus need not be faithful to the original to be a good translation. For Benjamin, however, translation is nonetheless dependent on the translatability of a text. But translatability itself is a shifting concept, independent from the value of a work. It is, as Benjamin says, an inherent quality in the original that manifests in translation. Hence, (un)translatability or the ability of a text to hover between transference and loss of meaning, can be utilized to focus and study the nature of the original and translation, the literary or cultural referents, and the places where meaning, power, aesthetics, and canons manifest. In this respect, Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* presents a fascinating case to study. Although it

[3] Parts of this chapter were published. Here are the details: Tiwari, Bhavya. "Rabindranath Tagore's Comparative World Literature." *The Routledge Companion to World Literature.* Ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir. London: Routledge Companions Series, 2011. 41-48. Print.

is questionable whether the translatability of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* in English could ever unequivocally be called "good," it does live rather sumptuously in its afterlives – in different languages, poets, authors, and forms. In fact, as I hope to show, in Tagore's case the death/life aporia of the translated *Gitanjali* does not lead to a split "discourse in the field of translation studies," where "translation is deemed essential to the dissemination and preservation of textual inheritance," but also understood to be an agent of "linguistic extinction" (Apter 4).

In "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin divorces a work of art from its receiver. He declares, "No poem is intended for the reader. No picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener" (69), only to raise a pertinent question, "Is a translation meant for readers who do not understand the original?" For Benjamin any translation that intends to serve the reader is ultimately a bad translation. When the original doesn't exist for its readers, how could a translation? By uprooting art from its immediate ecology, translation acquires, for Benjamin, a life of its own. It becomes a distinct artistic mode, albeit one whose laws are inherent in the translatability of the original. While it is translatability that connects the original with the translated work, and it is the original that gives birth to the translation, the relationship between the translated and the original is never that of Saidian "self" and the "other." The original survives because of the continuous translatability that gives new avatars to the original, which after a while no longer hark back to *the* original.

Keeping in mind the Benjaminian context of life and death, I argue in this chapter that Tagore's *Gitanjali* is a case in point to analyze the gain and loss of "(un)translatability" in the local and global systems, and to guage this concept's significance to the global comparative literature. The self-translatability of Bengali *Gitanjali* into English by Tagore brings a new poetic form of prose-poems into Bengali, delineates Tagore's ideas on translation, revives the work of medieval Hindi poet Kabir, and fulfils Tagore's wish of going beyond the Ganges by almost becoming a living example of his "vishwa sahitya." This concept that he launched in 1907 is fundamental for understating the ethos of a new comparative literature whose foundation is just not in the original but also in translation. The chapter concludes to show that *Gitanjali* was Tagore's culmination of his genius as a poet and critic, and for the global comparative literature there is more to learn from the various translatability of *Gitanjali* than to lament a loss that never occurred to the original language.

Tagore, a translator in conflict

Tagore is a man whose fame and literary rise and fall on the world and national stage are closely tied to the reputation of his self-translations, and yet he hardly wrote an essay or delivered a lecture dedicated to the process of translation, the need for translation, or methods of translation. But then again he could be excused, as he was first an artist, not a critic or translator, or at least that's what he thought. Despite his absence in the realm of critical conversations on translation, Tagore is credited with inaugurating

translation as a rewarding literary and commercial practice for the first time in India. One finds scattered in his letters and essays a gamut of emotions pertaining to translation, especially of *Gitanjali*, that reveal Tagore's complicated relationship with translation as a literary, scholarly, and creative activity. Moreover, as observed by literary scholars like G. N Devy, the year 1912 brought the first Nobel Prize in Asia and the only Nobel Prize for literature to India, and thereby stimulated the "beginning of translation in India, for it is since then, following Tagore, that Indian translators turned to translating contemporary Indian works" (qtd. in Rita Kothari 23). Before Tagore won the Nobel Prize, literary critics, generally found among the Orientalists, aimed only at translating ancient texts from India. But with *Gitanjali* receiving the Nobel Prize Tagore opened a new avenue, as clearly evident in the change of situation vis-à-vis the prior orientalist emphasis on translating the ancient Indian texts over modern ones, demonstrating what André Lefevere calls in his book, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, the role played by "translations in the constitution and revisions of various canons and in the struggle between various poetics" (139). Certainly, the English *Gitanjali* becomes not only a representative of global traditions and the evolving canon of its time, but also a local version of global poetics and politics, where the author and the translator, only to baffle the critic, are one.

The collapse, however, between the identity of the author and translator has raised important questions. Whether the English *Gitanjali* be considered a product of translation, rewriting, or transformation remains an issue of great debate. The Nobel Prize

citation declares that Tagore was recognized for the award "because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West."[4] The citation doesn't say directly anything about the translation, but emphasizes that Tagore expressed "his poetic thought" in "his own English words." But the vast inconsistencies between the Bengali *Gitanjali* and English *Gitanjali* remind one of the liberties Edward FitzGerald took in producing *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Tagore himself remained unsure and uncertain about the nature of his English *Gitanjali.* Sometimes he called the poems translations, only to later contradict himself in letters written to his well-wishers. And if this was not enough, he was also never happy with the translations of his verses made by others. Yet *Gitanjali*'s multiple translatability represent a milestone, not just in Tagore's poetic career, home and abroad, but in its capacity to become a modern connecting node in the local and global systems.

Dismissing Tagore's translational efforts, Sujit Mukherjee in his *Translation as Recovery* says that the English *Gitanjali*'s unique position and reception were the "result of the author endeavoring to be his own translator," which climaxed into a "transformation" rather than a "translation" of the work. On *Gitanjali*'s translation, Mukherjee adds, "Rabindranath Tagore himself must share part of the blame in conspiring with the rest of the world to perpetuate the myth of this work being a 'translation'" (5). Indeed, what Tagore did to his own poetry in English would hardly

[4] http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1913/

have been ventured by just a translator. And yet we will never know if what Mukherjee calls "transformation" was *not* a kind of "translatability" for Tagore. We must remember that (un)translatability by virtue of being an inherent quality of a text is dependent on several literary and extraliterary factors. This will become clearer in chapter 2. Further, it is difficult to speculate whether Tagore would have become a world poet as well as an Indian poet if somebody else had translated his work. Translation, whether we like it or not, is closely tied with the survival as well as the demise of an author.

Tagore long ago recognized the role translation plays in the survival of an author, not just locally but also globally. In a letter that he wrote in 1932, collected in *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, two decades after receiving the Nobel Prize, to his life-long friend William Rothenstein, Tagore says:

> Poets are proverbially vain and I am no exception. Therefore if I cherish even an exaggerated notion of the value of my own poems which are in Bengali I am sure you will half humorously tolerate it. But I am no such fool as to claim an exorbitant price for my English which is borrowed acquisition coming late in my life. . . . But yet sometimes I feel almost ashamed that I whose undoubted claim has been recognized by my countrymen to a sovereignty in our own world of letters should have waited till it was discovered by the outside world in its own true majesty and environment, that I should ever go out of my way to court attention of others having their own language for their enjoyment and use. At least it is never the function of a poet to personally help in the transportation of his

> poems to an alien form. . . . However, you must own that you alone were to blame for this and not myself (419).

A careful reader will notice that Tagore suffers from the pangs of translating *Gitanjali* even two decades after receiving the Nobel Prize. He almost feels that he went out of his way to speak in a language that he should not have, and laments the fact that his country only recognized his literary genius after his work was "discovered" by the outside world. And then, as if this confession was not more than enough, he makes his friend a partner in crime in his glorious fame.

Regardless of Tagore's complicated association with the self-translation of *Gitanjali*, he used translation as a creative, humanistic, and self-marketing enterprise to connect the global with the local. Tagore is one of the very few poets from his era who took on the task of disseminating his work in a foreign language via translation. Goethe had certainly enjoyed his French reception, and once claimed that preferred reading his *Faust* in French than in German, but he did not translate it. Baudelaire, on the other hand, had made Poe a great man in France, but left it to Swinburne and Symons to bring his own work to England. Tagore, however, took the mission on himself. We might expect that a poet's self-translation would be particularly, even uniquely, faithful to the original, given the poet-translator's intimate access to his own intentions and habits of the language. In this case, however, the result was that the Tagore in Bengali and the Tagore in English became two different entities, and this variability is closely connected with Tagore's own shifting presence in non-Bengali and non-English literary contexts globally

and locally. S.K. Das in his *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* believes that the reception and translation of Tagore in various literary traditions in India and abroad are independent of one another (26), which could give us rich material to compare and conceptualize translation modern connecting thread amongst literary traditions. In reality, however, none of Tagore's works, whether self-translated or untranslated, can be divorced from each other. To appreciate Tagore one must be open to read his translatability locally and globally, independent of one's position on the globe.

Tagore's complicated relationship with the English language

Born in 1861 under English rule, Tagore went to England in 1878, only to return degreeless in 1880. Reminiscing about his time in London, Tagore writes in *My Boyhood Days* (1940) that he "hung about the schoolroom" but could never give his mind to it (91). Further, he adds:

> I was able to study in the university for three months only, but I obtained almost all my understanding of English culture through personal contacts. The Artist who fashions us takes every opportunity to mingle new elements in his creation. Three months of real intimacy with English hearts sufficed for this development . . . . I went to England but I did not become a barrister: I received no shock calculated to shatter the original framework of my life – rather East and West met in friendship in my own person. And thus it has been given me to realize in my own life the meaning of my name (91-2).

It is clear from the above excerpt that Tagore took his trip to England to enrich his creative skills, though we are told that his internal rhythm of life didn't alter. But it is curious to also note that he associates his first name Robi, meaning "sun" in Bengali, with the purpose of uniting the two halves of the earth – east and west. Tagore, indeed, had no formal training in the English language, he learned it at home and employed it effectively in social gatherings and in his travels. Historical predicament had forced Tagore into knowing the English language. His creative work, however, either written or self-translated, in English did not result from a compulsion. Still, unlike such writers as Michael Madhusudhan Datta, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, and Torru Dutt, who began their literary careers in English only to later change to Bengali, Tagore had no early desire to become an English-language poet. In fact, in his foreword to a collection of poems written in English by Toru Dutt and others in the early part of the twentieth century, Tagore described the "poems as illustrations of imitative efforts of the Bengalis passionately responding to western literature, and asserted that 'our literature' (i.e. Bengali literature) has finally discovered its 'natural channel in the mother-tongue'" (*The English Writings* 16-7).

Bengali remained Tagore's primary language of creative and theoretical expression for a considerable time. Even when the Swedish Academy awarded Tagore the Nobel Prize for "profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill," he made "his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West," Tagore was exceedingly modest concerning his

English-language skills. In a letter preserved in Rabindra Bhavan (Shantiniketan), written to Pramathalal Sen in 1912, Tagore writes, "That I cannot write English is such a patent fact, that I never had even the vanity to feel ashamed of it" (qtd. in Mukherjee 116). And yet when Robert Bridges in 1915 wanted to revise and include a poem from the English *Gitanjali* for his anthology *The Sprit of Man*, Tagore wrote to William Rothenstein saying, "Since I have got my fame as an English writer, I feel extreme reluctance in accepting alterations in my English poems by any of your writers" (qtd. in Mukherjee 124). Like any complicated writer, Tagore sways from one extreme to another. He considers the self-translation of Bengali *Gitanjali* as truly a work of an English poet, with no chains attached to the "source" language, and yet at other times he laments that he can't write English or that he didn't translate *Gitanjali* right.

S. K. Das considers that it was only later in his career, when Tagore was well above forty, that he truly became a bilingual writer, though it would be necessary to add here that Tagore actively read books written in English, and was not unfamiliar with the language, contrary to his modest claims of not knowing the language. As a child he had translated sections of *Macbeth* in verse. Translation was, thus, not a foreign activity for Tagore. One finds sprinkled in his letters written to his well-wishers and friends in the literary circles around the world intricate thoughts on his self-translation and translation as a practice. For Tagore, creativity and translational activity were closely aligned with each other from the very beginning of his life. Tagore's role as a self-translator, however, officially launched him into a life of a prolific official bilingual author and world traveler.

This double identity or Tagore's translatability is evident even in his name. In Bengal he was (and still continues to be) known as Robi Thakur, while to the rest of the world he was and is, Rabindranath Tagore. It is curious to note that "Thakur" itself is not a last name but rather a respectful address to Brahmins, which got distorted as 'Tagore' in English.

The Birth of the English *Gitanjali*

Even before Tagore tried his hand at translating his *Gitanjali* as prose poems in English, Roby Dutta had translated eight of the songs for an anthology entitled *Echoes from East and West*, published in 1909. Roby Datta was a student of Cambridge, and later a well-known teacher of English Literature at Calcutta University, and a skilled translator who evidently anticipated a favorable reaction from Tagore (Mukherjee 115). But when he presented the poet with a copy of his translations, Tagore was not pleased. Later, Tagore wrote to his friend Pamathalal Sen: "I don't think my poems can be rendered properly into English . . . certainly not in rhymed verse. Maybe it can be done in plain prose. When I go to England I shall try my hand at it" (qtd. in Mukherjee 115). And he did try his hand, rendering and introducing himself to the English world, and consequently getting translated into several other European languages before he became famous in India beyond Bengal.

In a letter written to his niece Indira Devi in 1913, Tagore describes the circumstances that led to his translating *Gitanjali*. Feeling well-rested after a long

vacation in Shelaidah, Tagore tells his niece that he did not have any energy to "sit down and write anything new," so "I took up the poems of *Gitanjali* and set myself to translate them one by one." But immediately after expressing his desire of not writing anything new, Tagore reminds his niece that he did not, however, undertake this task in a spirit of "reckless bravado." He had in reality only felt an impulsive urge to "recapture" through a "medium of another language" the feast of feelings and sentiments that his Bengali verses had ignited in him. The letter gives insightful details about how Bengali *Gitanjali* became English *Gitanjali,* and also reminds the reader that it was not a reckless but a creative activity, where the poet and the translator merged. The letter is certainly of a great documentary value to understand the birth of English *Gitanjali,* and the future prose poems in Bengali.

Tagore continues the story-like narrative in the letter, and tells his niece that the pages of a small exercise book came to be filled gradually, "and with it in my pocket I boarded the ship." He further adds:

> The idea of keeping it in my pocket was that when my mind became restless on the high seas, I could recline on a deck-chair and set myself to translate one or two poems from time to time. . . . Rothenstein already had an inkling of my reputation as a poet from another Indian Friend. Therefore, when in the course of conversation he expressed a desire to see some of my poems, I handed him my manuscript with some diffidence. I could hardly believe the opinion he expressed after going through it. He then made over the manuscript to Yeats. The story of

> what followed is known to you. From this explanation of mine you will see that I was not responsible for the offence, which was due mainly due to the force of circumstance (*The English Writings* 11).

Translating to ease the mind was not unknown to Tagore. He had done that as a child. But this time he translated with the hope that it would have an audience, first in Rothenstein, and perhaps later in Yeats. As explained by Tagore in the letter, the translation and publication of *Gitanjali* did happen suddenly, but the impulse was not spontaneous.

In another letter dated 14th May 1912 and preserved in Shantiniketan to Pramathalal Sen, an Oxford-educated Brahmo leader, Tagore expresses for the first time his dissatisfaction with Ajit Chakravarti's and Roby Datta's translations of his poems. He strongly disapproves of the metrical translations and hints at a preference for lucid prose renderings of his verses. The dissatisfaction and disappointment with translations is replete in the letter, but what is more important is the desire and resolution to self-translate in order to justify the creativity and the content of *Gitanjali*, which according to him were continuously misrepresented by translators in English. In the same letter, Tagore writes to Pramathalal Sen, "if possible I will try it myself when I reach England" (*The English Writings* 14). The English *Gitanjali* result both from his dislike for the translations made by his admirers of his work, and from his own developing creative interest in prose poems.

Tagore translates his *Gitanjali* while the critics frown

Tagore's career as a writer in English was quite unexpected for the Bengalis and Indians at large. In his "Introduction" to *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Sisir Kumar Das remarks that:

> The beginning of Rabindranath Tagore's career as a writer in English was sudden and without any particular creative compulsions. Till the publication of his first English work *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings), published by the Indian Society, London, in 1912, Rabindranath though a celebrity in Bengal, was an obscure figure outside the Bengali-speaking area in India, and totally unknown in the West. At that time he was fifty-one years old and his place in the history of Bengali literature was firmly assured (9).

With a dozen published plays, a considerable amount of essays and short stories, three major novels, and some "twenty odd books of verse," Tagore had concretely planted himself in the Bengali literary traditions (Das 9), though definitely not in the rest of India. For many of Tagore's admirers the English translation of *Gitanjali* is a gross mistake by a dexterous craftsman of verse in Bengali, and many critics simply frown upon the self-orientalization Tagore promoted in his translation of *Gitanjali*.

Nevertheless, one major critic, Buddhadev Bose, softened his earlier criticisms. Having formerly described the English *Gitanjali* as just an *offering* – a sacrifice – in English, a miracle of translation, where the miracle is not in survival, but in reincarnation

on a foreign soil, lacking the "sensual metrical arrangements of the original," in his "Tagore in Translation" (1963) Bose says that he now "feels like quarrelling with himself for having said" that (19). Bengali *Gitanjali*'s mellifluous rhyme scheme and lyricism are greatly acknowledged and often compared with Tagore's dry prose translations of English *Gitanjali* done in an Edwardian diction that no longer appeals to a modern reader. Attributing the genesis of *Gitanjali* to a sincere creative impulse, Bose, a self-translator himself, believes that if Tagore had been obliged to have been led by another poet or even a translator, this "impulse would not have carried him far" (17). Certainly, anyone who compares the two *Gitanjali*s knows that they are not the same. In fact, for many of the poems in the English *Gitanjali* one has to look for the "original" not in the Bengali *Gitanjali* but in the three volumes of Tagore's Bengali verses – *Naivedya* (1901), *Kheya* (1906), and *Gitimalya* (1914).

The very famous opening poem from the English *Gitanjali* has been taken not from the Bengali *Gitanjali* (1910), but from *Gitimalaya* (1914), a work that was published after the English *Gitanjali*. Thus, in a peculiar way, the translation has come before the original. Here are the opening lines of the first poem from the English *Gitanjali*:

> Thou hast made me endless, such is
> thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou
> emptiest again and again, and fillest it
> ever with fresh life (1).

The above poem is a translation of the 23rd poem from *Gitimalaya*:

> আমারে তুমি অশেষ করেছ

এমনি লীলা তব।
ফুরায়ে ফেলে আবার ভরেছ
জীবন নব নব।[5]

Literal translation:

You have made me infinite
such is your love-play.
You have sapped and filled me
again and again with a new life.

And this is the first Bengali poem from *Gitanjali*:

আমার মাথা নত করে দাও হে তোমার
চরণধুলার তলে।
সকল অহংকার হে আমার
ডুবাও চোখের জলে।[6]

Literal translation of the Bengali poem:

My head is bowed beneath
the dust on your feet.
Drown my arrogance
in the tears from my eyes.

The above two verses are completely different. The first verse from the English *Gitanjali* doesn't say anything about the speaker's pride or tears, contrary to the poem in the Bengali *Gitanjali*. And if this was not baffling enough, the arrangement of the poems in English *Gitanjali* is neither chronological nor in the order of their publication history. The poems are not even arranged in any thematic unity. Each English poem is self-

[5] http://tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Verses&bi=FF66344F-BF40-403F-F85B-407E73D94158&ti=FF66344F-BF40-4D3F-C85B-407E73D94158&ch=1
[6] http://tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Verses&bi=EDDED9E1-A4A0-4035-E51D-C70C8B1532CC&ti=EDDED9E1-A4A0-4C05-751D-C70C8B1532CC&ch=c

contained in itself, giving an impression that the collection is an anthology of Tagore's verses that he wrote over the entire decade. The very meaning of translation as rendering something "faithfully" is destabilized when comparing the two books by the same author. And yet the poems are not so divorced from their Bengali twins as to become a complete new work, no matter in which collection they might appear. Their translatabilty is connected.

Despite the discrepancy between the two poems above, there are several poems that are rendered effectively even if in an English that sounds odd to the modern reader. Let us compare the poem number 18 in the Bengali *Gitanjali* with its English counterpart number 22 to see the effectiveness of Tagore as a self-translator:

Bengali: poem number 18:

আজি শ্রাবণ-ঘন-গহন-মোহে
গোপন তব চরণ ফেলে
নিশার মতো নীরব ওহে
সবার দিঠি এড়ায়ে এলে।
প্রভাত আজি মুদেছে আঁখি,
বাতাস বৃথা যেতেছে ডাকি,
নিলাজ নীল আকাশ ঢাকি
নিবিড় মেঘ কে দিল মেলে।

কূজনহীন কাননভূমি,
দুয়ার দেওয়া সকল ঘরে,
একেলা কোন্ পথিক তুমি
পথিকহীন পথের 'পরে।
হে একা সখা, হে প্রিয়তম,
রয়েছে খোলা এ ঘর মম,
সমুখ দিয়ে স্বপনসম

যেয়ো না মোরে হেলায় ঠেলে।[7]

Literal translation:

Today with quiet hidden steps
the dense dark monsoon came
like the night eluding
everyone's attention.
Today the morning has closed eyes,
the easterly wind is giving it a call,
the shameless blue sky is,
covered with the dark dense clouds.

Songless are the woodlands,
all doors are closed.
You are the only solitary traveler
wandering on the deserted path.
Oh solitary friend, oh beloved,
open is this home and heart
Having given the dream
do not leave by pushing me away.

English by Tagore:

In the deep shadows of the rainy July,
with secret steps, thou walkest, silent
as night, eluding all watchers.
To-day the morning has closed its eyes,
heedless of the insistent calls of
the loud east wind, and a thick veil has
been drawn over the ever-wakeful blue
sky.
The woodlands have hushed their
songs, and doors are all shut at every
house. Thou art the solitary wayfarer
in this deserted street. Oh my only
friend, my best beloved, the gates are

[7] http://tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Verses&bi=EDDED9E1-A4A0-4035-E51D-C70C8B1532CC&ti=EDDED9E1-A4A0-4C15-851D-C70C8B1532CC&ch=1

open in my house—do not pass by like
a dream (26-7).

In his *Fortnightly Review*[8], Ezra Pound had declared this poem beautiful. And it is quite possible that he had not found Tagore's usage of "thou" and "thy" odd, since Pound himself was using the old English words while translating poems from European languages. Even in its English reincarnation, barring the old English "thou" and "wakest," the poem more or less successfully conveys the poet's longing for the beloved, who is the only "solitary" traveler in the "deserted streets" on a day when the ever-prying "blue sky" is covered with a thick veil of monsoon clouds. The extraordinariness of the meeting is conveyed and emphasized through the single-worded last line, "sky," of the first stanza and the final brief line of the last stanza: "a dream," suggesting the unreality of the moment offered by a chance occurrence. In the Bengali version, however, the longing, the extraordinariness of the event, the meeting, and the secrecy of the solitary traveler, are conveyed through a layer of sonorous semantics such as "shrabon" (monsoon), "gahan" (deep), and "gopan" (hidden), which catch the auditory and visual arrival of the monsoon clouds in the "nilaj nil aakash" (shameless blue sky) and the "pathikhin pather pare" (solitary traveler on the street) through alliteration and internal rhyme. Although the metrical rhyme scheme and rhythm are lost in the English version (as they would be in any language), it is difficult to overlook that the Bengali poems's central theme (the dream-like moment) comes across via the effective short last lines of

[8] http://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/2013/04/rabindranath-tagore/

the two-stanza prose poem – even when the two poems are not sequentially compatible in the two books. This is certainly a positive instance of Tagore's translation skills.

Tagore, however, on other occasions, combines two Bengali verses in the English *Gitanjali* or composes a completely new poem, often expressed in clichéd phrases. Hence for instance, the poem number 63 in the English *Gitanjali* reads as follows:

> Thou hast made me known to friends
> whom I knew not. Thou hast given
> me seats in homes not my own. Thou
> hast brought the distant near and
> made a brother of the stranger.
> I am uneasy at heart when I have to
> leave my accustomed shelter; I forget
> that there abides the old in the new,
> and that there also thou abidest.
> Through birth and death, in this
> world or in others, wherever thou
> leadest me it is thou, the same, the
> one companion of my endless life who
> ever linkest my heart with bonds of
> joy to the unfamiliar.
> When one knows thee, then alien
> there is none, then no door is shut.
> Oh, grant my prayer that I may
> never lose the bliss of the touch of the
> one in the play of many (52-3).

The equivalent of the above poem is, surprisingly, the number 3 poem in Bengali *Gitanjali*, which reads as follows:

> কত অজানারে জানাইলে তুমি,
> কত ঘরে দিলে ঠাঁই--
> দূরকে করিলে নিকট, বন্ধু,
> পরকে করিলে ভাই।
> পুরানো আবাস ছেড়ে যাই তবে
> মনে ভেবে মরি কী জানি কী হবে,

নূতনের মাঝে তুমি পুরাতন
সে কথা যে ভুলে যাই।
দূরকে করিলে নিকট, বন্ধু,
পরকে করিলে ভাই।

জীবনে মরণে নিখিল ভুবনে
যখনি যেখানে লবে,
চিরজনমের পরিচিত ওহে,
তুমিই চিনাবে সবে।
তোমারে জানিলে নাহি কেহ পর,
নাহি কোনো মানা, নাহি কোনো ডর;
সবারে মিলায়ে তুমি জাগিতেছ,
দেখা যেন সদা পাই।
দূরকে করিলে নিকট, বন্ধু,
পরকে করিলে ভাই।[9]

Literal translation:

How many unfamiliar you made known,
in how many homes you gave shelter --
You made distant close, friend,
you made a stranger brother.
When a familiar place is left,
the heart is anxious, I wonder what will happen next,
within the new you are the old,
that is forgotten.

You made distant close, friend,
you made a stranger brother.

In this cycle of life and death
wherever whenever you will
take me, only you will make
everything familiar.
To know you means none is a stranger,
neither there is arrogance, nor alienation;

[9] http://www.tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Verses&bi=EDDED9E1-A4A0-4035-E51D-C70C8B1532CC&ti=EDDED9E1-A4A0-4C05-951D-C70C8B1532CC&ch=1

you make all meetings possible in the world,
make sure I am always able to meet.
You made distant close, friend,
you made a stranger brother.

Tagore gives no apparent reason for translating the third poem of Bengali *Gitanjali* as the sixty-third poem of the English *Gitanjali*. As in the previous poems, there is a definite thematic unity between the above poems. Both poems convey in a serious tone the presence of someone who comforts the poetic speaker, and assists in meeting strangers who turn into the poetic speaker's brother. Further, the poetic speaker wishes to be constantly in this fortunate state. Yet the most essential unit of the Bengali poem is absent in its English counterpart – the merit of the Bengali poem is in the repetition of the last two lines: "doorke korile nikat, bondhu, / porke karolie bhai," which could literally be translated as: "You made distant near, friend, / you made stranger a brother." The English version lacks the refrain. Tagore could have easily included it. It is only in the first stanza that we get a sense of the distant becoming close, and the stranger turning into a brother. Further, the Bengali version is more secular, as it does not allude to granting the poetic speaker's prayer as the English version does. The Bengali poem addresses "the one in the play of many" of English as "bondhu" or "friend" in the refrain, which is nearer to the medieval *bhakti* poetry of Bengal, and ends with the sentiment that the poetic speaker should always remain in this fortunate state. It is curious to question why Tagore would allude to the word "prayer" in the English translation.

Although the Bengali *Gitanjali* has deep links with the Upanishadic conception of god and creation, the poems lack the defining voice of seers or religious sentiments. The

poems are more in line with the *kavya* tradition or love poetry of medieval Bengal. Tagore has primarily been recognized as a poet of "virah" or love-in-separation. Poem number 63 in English is thus a testimony of the kind of translatability he was creating in his translations. It is not hard to repeat the most important line of a poem in translation while keeping it covertly religious, especially when the original doesn't obstruct the transition in the target language through alliteration or internal rhyme. Clearly, while translating *Gitanjali* Tagore selected words and phrases that invariably "inclined towards supra-human connotations" (Mukherjee 106). Expressions that make the Bengali *Gitanjali* earthly are avoided or rendered differently in the English version.

Another verse will prove the above point. Poem number 3 in the English *Gitanjali* reads as:

> I know not how thou singest, my
> master! I ever listen in silent amaze-
> ment.
> The light of thy music illuminates the
> world. The life breath of thy music
> runs from sky to sky. The holy stream
> of thy music breaks through all stony
> obstacles and rushes on.
> My heart longs to join in thy song,
> but vainly struggles for a voice. I
> would speak, but speech breaks not into
> song, and I cry out baffled. Ah, thou
> hast made my heart captive in the end-
> less meshes of thy music, my master! (17-8).

The above poem's counterpart is number 22 in the Bengali *Gitanjali*:

তুমি কেমন করে গান কর যে গুণী,
অবাক হয়ে শুনি, কেবল শুনি।

সুরের আলো ভুবন ফেলে ছেয়ে,
সুরের হাওয়া চলে গগন বেয়ে,
পাষাণ টুটে ব্যাকুল বেগে ধেয়ে,
বহিয়া যায় সুরের সুরধুনী।

মনে করি অমনি সুরে গাই,
কণ্ঠে আমার সুর খুঁজে না পাই।
কইতে কী চাই, কইতে কথা বাধে;
হার মেনে যে পরান আমার কাঁদে;
আমায় তুমি ফেলেছ কোন্ ফাঁদে
চৌদিকে মোর সুরের জাল বুনি![10]

Literal translation:

Let me hear how you sing,
enrapt let me hear, only hear.
The notes illuminate the land,
the notes from the wind move the sky,
the stones break from the flowing
stream of your musical notes.

I wish to sing like that,
but the notes don't echo from my throat.
I want to say, there are many things to say;
but I lose and my soul cries;
where have you thrown me
everywhere is just a web of your notes.

On comparing the two poems, it is not difficult to observe the similarities. Both poems express a sense of wonder and amazement at the extraordinary skills of the singer in captivating the enrapt heart of the poet already in a trance. In that respect, the translation is not unfaithful – and perhaps thematically very close to the "original." In the Bengali version, however, the identity of the singer and the poet remain genderless, and there is

[10] http://www.tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Verses&bi=EDDED9E1-A4A0-4035-E51D-C70C8B1532CC&ti=EDDED9E1-A4A0-4C15-C51D-C70C8B1532CC&ch=c

no indication that the singer is a "master" of the poet. Bengali is a genderless language where verbs and pronouns do not specify gender in a sentence, and hence what was just a play between two lovers in Bengali, via informal pronouns "you" and "I" ("tumi" and "ami") takes an austere tone with formal words such as "master," "thou," and "thy," that almost give a Biblical overtone to the English afterlife of the poem.

While translating *Gitanjali* Tagore didn't keep the "translated" versions close to the "originals" in the traditional sense of replicating each poem faithfully. But poetry by its very virtue is open to several interpretations, as we will notice in the various registers of translatability created by Gabriela Mistral's translators in Chapter 2. The chances of a translator going beyond the original text are actually increased when the poet and the translator are one. In the English *Gitanjali* Tagore did not explain the reason for taking liberties with his poems; however, in his preface to *The Gardener* that came out after *Gitanjali*, Tagore writes, "Most of the lyrics of love and life, the translations of which from Bengali are published in this book, were written much earlier than the series of religious poems contained in the book named *Gitanjali.* The translations are not always literal – the originals being sometimes abridged and sometimes paraphrased" (80). Curiously, here, Tagore is quite at peace with the fact that he renders an abridged version of his Bengali poems. And he very clearly declares that his English *Gitanjali* is a collection of religious poems. Thus, the kind of translatability we see in the Tagore's English *Gitanjali* is what he had, to use the Benjaminian word, "intended" to do so. It

was in no way an accident, a failure, or a lacuna in the targeted language to express the richness from the source language, as many critics point out.

Tagore creates (un)translatability, and tries his hand at prose poems

While reminiscing about his childhood education in *My Boyhood*, Tagore writes about his teacher Gyan Babu who translated and paraphrased Kalidasa for him, and also assigned him the task to translate *Macbeth* as punishment when Tagore couldn't keep himself focused on coursework. Recall how Tagore had taken to translation, as he tells his niece in his letter, when he felt restless on the ship to England. Tagore tells us about his teacher the following:

> When he found he could not secure my attention for the school course, he gave up the attempt as hopeless and went on a different tack. He took me through Kalidas's *Birth of the War-god*, translating it to me as we went on. He also read *Macbeth* to me, first explaining the text in Bengali, and then confining me to the school room till I had rendered the day's reading into Bengali verse. In this way he got me to translate the whole play. I was fortunate enough to lose this translation and so am relieved to that extent of the burden of my *karma* (17).

Note Tagore's observation about his teacher translating the texts impromptu. Parts of Tagore's translations of *Macbeth* have in fact survived. The first scene of the witches has some very minor additions that are absent in the original. The scene is full of alliterations and sonorous words that help in separating the language of the witches from the humans.

Thus for instance, instead of just saying the “First Witch,” “Second Witch,” and “Third Witch,” Tagore translates them as “Umra,” “Doomra,” “Temra,” which really means nothing in Bengali, but has a nice upbeat rhyme. Further, the witches in Tagore’s translation decide to meet not exactly on the “heath” – a trope almost absent in lush Bengali poetry and landscape – but in a rhythmic “kanta khoncha mather maajhe,”[11] which could literally be translated as “in the land scratched with thorns.”

Even when Tagore translated Shelley’s “Love’s Philosophy” under the title, “Premtattwa,” the translated version is miraculously close to the “original.” Shelley’s poem:

> The fountains mingle with the river
> And the rivers with the ocean,
> The winds of heaven mix for ever
> With a sweet emotion;
> Nothing in the world is single,
> All things by a law divine
> In one another's being mingle-
> Why not I with thine?
>
> See! the mountains kiss high heaven,
> And the waves clasp one another;
> No sister flower would be forgiven,
> If it disdained it's brother;
> And the sunlight clasps the earth,
> And the moonbeams kiss the sea;--
> What are all these kissings worth,
> If thou kiss not me? (80).

Tagore’s translation:

> নিঝর মিশেছে তটিনীর সাথে

[11] http://www.tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Verses&bi=FF66344F-BF40-40DF-E85B-407E73D94158&ti=FF66344F-BF40-4ABF-685B-407E73D94158&ch=c

তটিনী মিশেছে সাগর-'পরে,
পবনের সাথে মিশিছে পবন
চির-সুমধুর প্রণয়-ভরে!
জগতে কেহই নাইকো একেলা,
সকলি বিধির নিয়ম-গুণে,
একের সহিত মিশিছে অপরে
আমি বা কেন না তোমার সনে?
দেখো, গিরি ওই চুমিছে আকাশে,
ঢেউ-'পরে ঢেউ পড়িছে ঢলি,
সে কুলবালারে কে বা না দোষিবে,
ভাইটিরে যদি যায় সে ভুলি!
রবি-কর দেখো চুমিছে ধরণী,
শশি-কর চুমে সাগর জল,
তুমি যদি মোরে না চুম', ললনা,
এ-সব চুম্বনে কী তবে ফল?[12]

Literal translation:

The fountain mingles with the river
the river mingles with the ocean,
the winds mingle with the wind
with a life full of emotions!
No one is alone in this world,
that is the law of the divine.
In one's being the other mingles
why am I not mingled with you?
Look! The mountain kisses the sky
and the waves melt with waves,
what sister flower could be forgiven
if it forgot its brother!
The sunlight kisses the earth,
the moonlight kisses the ocean's water,
But if you do not kiss me,

[12] http://www.tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Verses&bi=FF66344F-BF40-40DF-E85B-407E73D94158&ti=FF66344F-BF40-4ACF-A85B-407E73D94158&ch=1

what's the worth of others' kissing?

The translated version retains the thematic unity. In fact, even the passionate concluding lines "What are all these kissings worth, / If thou kiss not me" flow smoothly in Bengali. For some reason, Tagore is highly faithful to the original, and takes only minor liberties when translating from English to Bengali; however, when he is translating his work from Bengali into English, he takes liberties. In his self-translations, Tagore seems to be more interested in communicating ideas, condensing and cutting the "source" text to suit the texture of the "target," and generally rendering Bengali into high spiritual content – or creating a translatability of himself as a religious poet. Many critics have noticed that after the unexpected success of Tagore's *Gitanjali*, which ran into twelve reprints before he was awarded the Nobel Prize, Tagore began to think that it was the devotional and mystic element that brought him success and was most suited for translation. Even when he translated non-spiritual poems into English, he clothed them with devotional attire.

It was, however, not just his own work that he often rendered in abstruse versions. After receiving the Nobel Prize in 1913, Tagore published a translation of Kabir, a sixteenth-century poet writing in medieval Hindi, which remained for a long time the only available translation of Kabir in English. Tagore is often accused of translating Kabir's songs into prosaic English verses similar to his own translation of *Gitanjali* while possessing very little knowledge of the language of the original text. Instead of keeping Kabir's poems secular and open to several interpretations in English, Tagore showers on

them his own personal religiosity and monotheistic interpretations of Hinduism, according to Vijay C. Mishra. Further, Kabir's rather earthy use of language, sexual tension, and sharp humor are transformed into loose clichéd mystical verse in Tagore's hands. Thus, a verse by Kabir:

> बालम आउ हमारै ग्रेह रे I
>
> तुम्ह बिन दुखिया देह रे II टेक II
> सब कोई कहै तुम्हारी नारी मोकौं यह अन्देह रे I
> एकमेक हूं सेज न सोवैं तब लगी कैसा नेह रे II1II
> अन्न न भावै नींद न आवै ग्रिह बन धरे न धीर रे I
> ज्यौं कांमी कौ कांमिनी प्यारी ज्यौं प्यासे कौ नीर रे II2II
> है कोई ऐसा पर उपगारी हरि सौं कहे सुनाइ रे I
> अब तौ बेहाल कबीर भय हैं बिनु देखें जिउ जाई रे II3II (9).

whose literal translation Vijay C. Mishra provides as:

> Beloved, come within my house, my body years for you,
> everyone says I am your woman, yet of this I have no assurance.
> For until we have slept in one bed, this love of ours remains unconsummated.
> I cannot eat, I cannot sleep; I am restless within
> and without. As a woman to a lustful man, as water to someone
> thirsty, so are you to me. Isn't there any helpful soul who
> could take these words of mine to Hari? For now Kabir is
> delirious and expires without seeing him (Mishra 169).

has been translated by Tagore as:

> My body and my mind are grieved for the want of Thee;
> O my Beloved! come to my house.
> When people say I am Thy bride, I am ashamed; for I have not touched
> Thy heart with my heart.
> Then what is this love of mine? I have no taste for food, I have no
> sleep; my heart is ever restless within doors and without.
> As water is to the thirsty, so is the lover to the bride. Who is there

that will carry my news to my Beloved?

Kabir is restless: he is dying for sight of Him (*The English Writings* 514-5).

Unfortunately, in the translated version the bold reference to consummation and yearning for the beloved's body is lost to the grieving mind and body, which can only be satiated, sadly, by the touch of "Thy heart with my heart." There is no reference to pain or grief in the original, just plain desire for the beloved's body. Further, the subjectivity of the speaker's "I" is separate from that of Kabir, who is perhaps just witnessing the longing of the "I" for "Hari"; in fact, it is unclear from the last line in the original if Kabir's deliriousness, after watching and/or hearing the blatant desire of the "I," is being further observed by a third person in the poem. All this is lost in Tagore's translation, including the beloved "Hari" replaced with a monotheistic "god," translated as "Thy," "Thee," and "Him." It is pertinent to question the reasons behind Tagore's preferring a religious translatability, just not of his own work but also of others. In the process, despite the "(mis)translations" of Kabir, Tagore did revived scholarly interest in the medieval poet's work.

Calling the task of a translator arduous, in his "Tagore in Translation" Buddhadev Bose thinks that Tagore's genius was "too happy, too ample, and too exuberant for the humble and laborious task of translation," and hence the translation of *Gitanjali* was a sheer "stroke of luck" (16). For Bose, who was an eminent comparatist, poet, and translator, at least in Tagore's case translation is not a creative or playful activity. It is a task. Nevertheless, as I showed in the various examples above, Tagore can be very

faithful to his and others' poems, it is just that he *preferred* a particular kind of translatability.

We must not forget that as a young child Tagore had translated the entire *Macbeth* into Bengali verse. Later in life, he took translation to another level. Tagore spontaneously paraphrased Kalidasa's work and extracts from Upanishads, and toward the last stages of his life he produced a version of Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" in Bengali – not just because he admired Eliot, but because he was experimenting with the form of the prose-poem[13]. Clearly, for Tagore, translation was not just a matter of transferring the "source" into the "target" but a mode for creating translatability, and experimenting with new poetic forms and genres in other languages. In fact, as Shyamal Kumar Sarkar tells us in his "Tagore on Translation," Tagore in a letter to his friend Ajit Chakravorty dated 1913 from Illinois said, "To be less at home in English may turn out to be an advantage especially in the matter of translating shorter lyrics" (74). English *Gitanjali* is indeed his short verses rendered in as prose-poems, a genre he later inaugurated in Bengali literature.

Recognizing Tagore's interest in translation and its connection to his poetic works, Sisir Kumar Das in the "Introduction" to *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* (1994) says that Tagore's translations and writings done in English are vital for a fuller understanding of his contribution to Bengali literature and language. One such example, he points out, is Tagore's experimentation with what the poet aptly called

[13] See Tagore's "Modern Poetry" in *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings on Literature and Language,* 241-53.

"gadya-kabita" (prose-poems). "Gadya-kabita" was a new poetical structure, introduced by Tagore in 1931-2 in Bengali. Written in rhythmic prose where syntactical units such as phrases and short clauses are arranged as in verse, its closest approximation of is "free-verse." In fact, in the preface to *Punasca* (1932), Tagore acknowledges that the first idea for creating poetic strictures like "gadya-kabita" occurred to him while he was translating *Gitanjali* into English.

In "The Prose Poem," a lecture delivered five year before his death, Tagore says that the strength of poetry doesn't depend on "metrical array." Lauding the artistic merit of prose-poems in Bengali and connecting them to his English translation of *Gitanjali*, he proudly states, "I had translated my *Gitanjali* into English prose." Although in the lecture, he says that he was embarrassed by the excessive praise he received world wide, the fact that the world "could extract the poetic sap from it in full measure" helped him decide that translating poems into English prose was no loss. On the contrary, a verse translation of it would have been "unworthy" (*Selected Writings* 333). Recall that Tagore had disliked metrical translations of his poems by others. Emphasizing the poetic merit of prose poems, Tagore ends his lecture by saying that he has written many prose poems whose content could not have been expressed in any other form, even in Bengali.

Worlding Tagore's translatability of *Gitanjali*

Unlike Goethe who did not translate his lyrical *Faust*, but admired its prose-like form in French, and believed that stylistically "simple prose is most suited" for

translation as it "neutralizes foreign work's distinct particularities" by acquainting the magnificence in the foreign through a filter of "national domesticity" (Pizer 8), Tagore translated his lyrical Bengali into English prose poems, becoming an Indian poet and a Bengali poet in part by making himself first into a world poet. Before 1912, although Tagore was a well-known poet in Bengal, he was hardly read in other parts of India. With his self-translation of *Gitanjali* into English he single-handedly changed his fortune both in the local and global literary systems. His English *Gitanjali*, very much a new afterlife of his Bengali *Gitanjali*, was translated into several other languages. He is perhaps the only poet in the world whose self-translations into English ended up producing several versions in other languages.

However, unlike Goethe who was happy to read a translated reflection of himself in foreign literatures, Tagore not only disliked the translations others did of his work in English, but remained unhappy with his self-translation. Even after Tagore's translation of *Gitanjali* was appreciated by W.B. Yeats at the dinner party arranged by Rothenstein, he was continuously wary of his translation, perhaps justifiably. All his life he thought his English *Gitanjali* was an "offence." But to whom? To his Bengali original? Or to the English-speaking world? In an interesting letter written to his perceptive scholar friend Kshiti Mohan Sen in 1912, he remarks, "People here have taken to my work with such excessive enthusiasm that I cannot really accept it. My impression is that when a place from which nothing is expected somehow produces something, even an ordinary thing, people are amazed – that is that state of mind here" (*Selected Letters* 90). It is noteworthy

that after making this observation, which clearly suggests the occident-orient conflict, a legacy of the dying nineteenth century, Tagore looks at his journey to England as some sort of divine pilgrimage that god has intended for him:

> it was for this that my God dragged me to this country at my age – for it is literature, art and suchlike that are the real bridges uniting one country with another. Maybe from all this I should eliminate my personal self and humbly acknowledge the best in my writing without hesitation. . . .I feel as if God is expressing His own gladness through others' praise of my work; it is as if He has brought me from East to West in order to make me aware of the fact of his gladness. . . .I am preparing myself to submit to the honour with my forehead touching the dust (90).

Notice in the above letter that Tagore thinks, quite appropriately, literature and art to be the only uniting forces between countries. But he also contemplates that he is the chosen one to foment those connections between east and west.

For some reason Tagore believed his enthusiastic acceptance in England to be part of some divine plan, a viewpoint visible even in the letter that he wrote to Yeats after he sent off the introduction to *Gitanjali*:

> It has been such a great joy to me to think that things that I wrote in a tongue not known to you should at last fall in your hands and that you should accept them with so much enjoyment and love. . . . What my soul offered to my master in the solitude of an obscure corner of the world must be brought before

> the altar of man where hearts come together and tongues mingle like the right and the left palms if hands joined in the acts of adoration. . . .My heart fills with gratitude and I write to you this letter to say the appreciation from a man like you comes to me not only as a reward for my lifelong devotion to literature but as a token that my songs have been acceptable to Him, and He has led me over the sea to this country to speak to me His approval of my works through your precious friendship (93-4).

This passage is replete with sentiments suggesting his apprehensiveness for the praise and success he received on translating *Gitanjali*. The letter also shows Tagore's firm faith in his personal god, whom he called "Jivan Devta" (the god of life force), as guiding his life and work for a noble suprahuman purpose. No wonder religious translatability in the English *Gitanjali* spoke well to Tagore. It is important, however, that Tagore mentions his verses having originally been written in a language unknown to Yeats "in the solitude of an obscure corner of the world," as though Bengal's millions of people had vanished from his own view as well as from Yeats's eyes. Here we see that Tagore realizes that his self-translations brought him an unprecedented glory and instant fame in a global language like English – a fortune that not all translations into global languages enjoy, as we will see in the second chapter.

Tagore, however, is not alone to be blamed for the religious translatability he creates in his English *Gitanjali* and other later works. In his "Introduction" to Rabindranath Tagore's English *Gitanjali*, W. B. Yeats said that he carried the translations

of the verses wherever he went, including railway trains, buses, and restaurants, and often had to close the book "lest some stranger would see" how moved he was. "These lyrics," he adds, are "in the original" and display a world "that I have dreamed all my life long." Comparing Tagore's poems with Chaucer's forerunners and the writings of Renaissance European saints, Yeats considers *Gitanjali* as holding a world whose civilization is "unbroken," and "where poetry and religion are the same thing" (xiv). He further goes on to say that the verses in *Gitanjali* "will not lie in little well-printed books upon ladies' tables . . . but as the generations pass, travelers will hum them" (xv). Certainly, Yeats was right about that. But it is debatable whether generations hum Tagore's self-translated *Gitanjali* or its multiple versions in other languages.

If Yeats saw in Tagore's work a union between poetry and religion, Tagore too had no trouble accepting his role as that of the "chosen one." Nabaneeta Dev Sen has done an exhaustive study on the reception of Tagore in Europe and the US, and she observes in her study that part of *Gitanjali*'s success was Tagore's personal charm – he was looked at as the wise oriental poet singing songs when the world was at the brink of the First World War. Tagore, too, had presented himself as a stereotype from the East. It is sometimes hard to believe that Tagore was only received as a literary man. Ezra Pound wrote in the *Fortnightly Review* that "I do not want to confuse Mr. Tagore's personality with his works," and yet he says "the relation of the two is so close. . . . When I leave Mr. Tagore I feel exactly as if I were a barbarian clothed in skins and carrying a stone war-club" (Pound 576). By the time Tagore visited South America in 1920s he had acquired a

dubious reputation – almost of a mystic or prophet – as predicted by him in the letter written to his friend C.F. Andrews (*Letters to a Friend* 175).

Victoria Ocampo, too, wrote that "Theosophists came in great numbers imagining that Tagore was one of them. One morning an unknown lady insisted on seeing Tagore immediately. . . .Later we learnt she had come to ask him to interpret her dreams" (28-9). Tagore himself wrote in "East to West" published in *The Atlantic Monthly* (1927) that after one of his lectures, he "was approached by one who wished to learn from me personal secrets about some other individual whom I had never known" (732). In Brazil, writes Cecilia Meireles, Tagore had become such a familiar name that some people confused his identity with other European poets of old. Let us bear in mind that Yeats too had described Tagore as exhibiting the poetic skills of Renaissance saints. Meireles recalls an occasion "when Tagore's poetry was being discussed and a fairly famous person was calmly heard to announce, 'But Tagore isn't alive today . . . he's a very old poet, far away back in the past" (334). "In general," writes Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Tagore had no real profile "as far as his Western reputation went, except for a handful of intellectuals who had special interest in the East" (17). Yet his poetry was gaining in translation. Tagore's poetry was being continuously compared to the Psalms for its spiritual content and quaint archaic charm. There were occasions when he was actually compared to Christ. In fact, a journalist wrote that when Tagore was driving down a hill in Germany with Count Keyserling and his students were walking beside him, the scene "looked as if it was taken from the Bible" (qtd. in Dev Sen 8). Sadly, Tagore had ceased

to be human. He became a sage, a prophet, a mystic who could read minds, interpret dreams, and bring solace to troubled souls.

The Nobel Prize, which had brought literary recognition to Tagore across the world, including in his own nation, became the death knell to his artistic enterprise. It almost started a new career, whose foundation Tagore himself had laid by self-translating *Gitanjali.* Tagore was accepted as a world poet only on one condition. He was foremost a preacher, a prophet, a sage, and only then a poet. Tagore had himself recognized the transformation. In a letter written to his friend Andrews, he writes, "I have developed all the symptoms of growing into a schoolmaster, and there is a grave danger of my ending as a veritable prophet . . . . Who is there to save a poet from disaster?" (*Letters to a Friend* 175). Tagore was suspicious of the frenzied fame from the very beginning. He had expected that this sudden outburst of ecstatic admiration would result in a sharp fall, especially when he was always unsure of his English translation. In a letter written to C.F. Andrews in 1921, Tagore says, "Such fame I have got I cannot take at all seriously . . . . I feel frightened and tired of it – and even sad" (*Selected Letters* 171). A big part of Tagore's fame rested on the self-translation and mystical content of *Gitanjali,* and he was aware of the gross liberties he had taken while translating it.

But Tagore continues to translate and rewrite . . .

Yet Tagore continued to translate incessantly and never attempted to retranslate his work. In a letter written to William Rothenstein, expressing his gratitude to Yeats in

aiding him in preparing *Gitanjali*'s manuscript, Tagore says, "Latterly I have written and published both prose and poetry in English, mostly translations, unaided by any friendly help, but this again I have done in order to express my ideas, not for gaining any reputation for my mastery in the use of language which can never be mine" (qtd. in Dev Sen 68). Curiously, despite such disclaimers, Tagore genuinely enjoyed rendering his work in another language. And when the self-translation came with the opportunity to fulfill his childhood dream of bringing nations together, and with the self-marketing of himself as a world poet, even the mediocrity of his self-translation did not matter.

The Nobel Prize had rekindled a childhood desire in Tagore – to bring east and west closer – visible in one of Tagore's earliest writings as early as in 1878 when he was just seventeen years old. In "Bangalir Asha O Nairashya," an essay published in *Bharati*, just after his first return from England, he says that a "full character will be formed from a synthesis"[14] between east and west. Ironically, the synthesis between east and west stemmed from the idea that the two halves of earth had opposite cultural, spiritual and civilizational values. If Europe could teach "active thoughts" and "practical intelligence," India in return could teach Europe "profound thought" and "imagination." But by the time Tagore came back from a second trip to England, his boyhood optimism was lost. In 1890, he wrote in his *Yurop Jatrir Dayari* (Journey to Europe) that people's external ways and customs may be a barrier to another, and that "an international feast is only possible in the realms of literature." And later in life, Tagore boldly mentions in *My*

[14] Translated by Stephen N. Hay as "The Origins of the Tagore's Message to the World" in *Quest*

Reminiscences that East and West met in a friendship in my person. Not to forget that the friendship really worked well for Tagore's own career as an author. Possibly, Tagore realized that universality as a quality could only be applied to literature and that authors that have the greatest potential to cross nations, languages, cultural barriers, and even individual tastes – in translation. It was perhaps this realization in 1890 that might have later caused Tagore to self-translate his works, especially *Gitanjali*.

Connecting Tagore's compulsion to self-translate with the theme of divine intervention in literature, Hiranmay Banerjee mentions that in the early beginnings of the twentieth century Tagore had started to believe in his personal god directing the poet's life. Tagore called his personal god *Jivan Devta*, who "controlled his activities" (Banerjee 32). Tagore was convinced that he was fulfilling the wish of his god through his creative output. In a poem written for his personal god in 1892, which he later translated, he said:

> I know not why thou chosest me for thy partner,
> Lord of my life.
> Didst thou store my days and nights,
> My deeds and dreams for the alchemy
> Of thy art, and string the chain of
> The music of my songs of autumn and spring
> And gather the flowers from my mature
> moments for thy crown (qtd. in Banerjee 34).

Except for the annoying "thou" and "thy," the poem effectively expresses with two separate indented lines his sense that his finest mature songs are nothing but glittering offerings for the "Lord" of his life. Curiously, Tagore dedicated the poems in *Gitanjali* to his "Jivan Devta." The very word *Gitanjali* means an offering of songs. Hiranmay Banerjee believes that the concept of "Jivan Devta" had inspired Tagore to pour out

poetry in some of his most difficult times, especially after the death of his wife and daughter.

Calling the concept of "Jivan Devta" unique, Banerjee writes that it "presents us with a unique phenomenon in the field of world literature . . . . Seldom has a poet been under the commanding spell of a single theme which provided him with sufficient inspiration to fill up book after book with poems" (34-5). Three entire books of poems, *Gitanjali, Gitali,* and *Gitimalya* are addressed to "Jivan Devta." Tagore had looked at his success in the west as also some sort of divine plan from the very start of his journey, and in the frenzied acceptance of *Gitanjali* in the west, "Tagore found a wonderful proof of his life-long dream of the union of East and West." The moment Tagore realized he had been able 'to give' something to the west, his fond idea that the west 'needed help' was confirmed. The Nobel Prize calmed any other doubts he had in this regard (Dev Sen 114).

However, Tagore didn't ask for assistance in fulfilling this "noble purpose" for bringing the east-west together, and he kept producing mediocre translations of his work. Indeed, unlike Goethe who had envisioned Germans playing an integral role in the era of *Weltliteratur,* Tagore to some extent thought of himself as the chosen one. Regarding this, Dutta and Robinson are of the opinion that despite knowing his translations to be of a low standard, Tagore "connived in their republishing because, for all his protestations to the contrary, he could not bear to let go of his western literary fame" (443). One of the first persons to express doubts about the literary merit of English *Gitanjali* was Edward Thomson, who wrote the first major biography of Tagore in English. Like C. F. Andrews

– a life long friend of Tagore – Thomson was a missionary. Unlike Andrews, however, Thomson had a very different temperament. He had tried to suggest some changes to Tagore on his unpublished poems, but Tagore could "never overcome his pride," which "rebelled against accepting extensive corrections, especially from someone of low literary standing as compared to W. B. Yeats and others in England" (Dutta and Robinson 132). In a letter written to Thomson just a week after winning the Nobel Prize in November 1913, Tagore says:

> I hope we are friends and you will not misunderstand me. I have done a wrong to you and I must ask your pardon for it. While you were minutely going over my MSS your very kindness embarrassed me and prevented me from being frank with you – which was foolish on my part and absolutely oriental – and for which I have been feeling ashamed ever since. The *Gitanjali* poems are intimately personal to me and the pleasure I have of polishing their English versions is of a different nature [from] that of an author revising his works for publication. Every line of these should be as closely my own as possible though I must labour under the disadvantage of not being born to your language. In such a case I have to be guided by my instinct, allowing it to work almost unconsciously without being hindered by more than casual suggestions from outside. I think the method that Yeats followed while editing my book was the right one in selecting those poems that required least alteration and rejecting others in spite of their merits. There is a grave risk of my overlooking crudities of language. . . but still I must go on with

> my work unaided till I have done what is in my power to do (*Selected Letters* 132)[15].

This letter highlights Tagore's artistic integrity rather than his "pride." He very politely declines any help from Thompson, and in the course of his response reveals that Yeats, too, didn't do anything to his *Gitanjali*, except advising him on choosing the ones suitable for publication. Note here Tagore's description of "polishing" these poems as a pleasurable activity: it is not a laborious task despite his modest acceptance of not being at home in Thompson's language.

With time, Tagore became increasingly convinced that his poems could not be translated. In the early part of his career he was convinced that *only* he could do justice to his poems by translating them, and later in his life he almost believed as gospel truth that verse just could not be translated. In another letter that he wrote to Thompson in 1921 he said that "translating a poem is doing it wrong. . . . Have you a single honest translation in English, from poems written in any other European language, which occupies a decent seat in your literature?" He goes on to say, "Is not Dante in English a dead star which has its heavy load of materials and no light?" And he ends the letter by reiterating that perhaps it is more merciful to leave Shelley and Keats un-translated than to give them a new life in Bengali (*Selected Letters* 289). Despite his emphasisis that it is merciful to leave Shelley and Keats untranslated, we know that Tagore had translated Shelley with extreme care. Further, Thompson and Tagore shared a very complicated association,

[15] Letter # 74

especially after Thompson had criticized Tagore's renditions of *Gitanjali.* Conversely, it is very much possible that Tagore here is defending the untranslatability of his *Gitanjali* and restating to Thompson the modern Western perspective which would have made sense to him, by reechoing Robert Frost's famous sentence: "poetry is what is lost in translation."

In another letter written to E. P. Thompson, almost a decade later, Tagore explains the reasons for being "unfaithful" in his translation:

> You know I began to pay court to your language when I was fifty. It was pretty late for me to hope to win her heart. . . . I know my limitations – and I fear to rush into the field reserved for angels to tread. In my translations I timidly avoid all difficulties, which has the effect of making them smooth and thin. I know I am misrepresenting myself as a poet to the western readers. But when I began this career of falsifying my own coins I did it in play. Now I am becoming frightened of its enormity and am willing to make a confession of my misdeeds and withdraw into my original vocation as a mere Bengali poet. I hope it is not too late and if you ever feel ready to translate my works into English I shall be glad to help you. Copyright difficulties will not be in your way if we allow Macmillan to publish the translations (*Selected Letters* 254)[16].

An old Tagore's tone has changed. From defending his translations to now accepting them as false, Tagore's journey has not been easy. He openly mentions that he timidly

[16] Letter # 164

avoided any difficulties while translating *Gitanjali*. Yet who would say that mingling two poems together to create a new one, or dressing a love poem as a religious, or a complete disregard for chronological sequence in his English *Gitanjali*, are characteristics of a timid translator? Though that he thinks of them as "false" or done in play reveal his boldness as a translator.

In her study of Tagore and Ocampo in *In Your Blossoming Flower-Garden: Rabindranath Tagore and Victoria Ocampo* Ketaki Kushari Dyson writes that Victoria Ocampo, a very close friend of Tagore, had heard accusations against Tagore to have chosen only "simple and sweet things" (163). But Ocampo had ignored these criticisms as being over-exaggerations until she witnessed it herself. Dyson writes that one morning Tagore called Ocampo and read his latest Bengali lyric and translated it orally, literally word for word. Finding it beautiful, Ocampo asked Tagore to write it down in English for her. That afternoon when Tagore read out an English version of the same poem to Ocampo and other two friends, Ocampo was deeply disappointed. She accused Tagore of having left out the most valuable part of the poem, the part that had delighted her in the morning. In response, Tagore acknowledged that he had omitted *that,* as he wasn't sure *that* could draw her attention. It is clear, writes Dyson, that Tagore just didn't meant "her attention; he meant the attention of all Western readers" (163). Indeed, another writer in Ocampo's circle, Jorge Luis Borges, called Tagore "incorrigibly imprecise," who in his "thousand and one lines" displays no "lyric tension" or verbal economy. Parodying

Tagore's *The Collected Poems and Plays*, Borges offers his readers a translation of Tagore's poem as the following: "[…]"(*Selected Non-Fictions* 181).

A decade and a half later, Tagore writes to Thompson while he and Amiya Chakravarti were preparing his *The Collected Poems and Plays* that he "appreciates the changes" suggested in the translation, but today the task is beyond him. "Twenty years ago," Tagore writes, "I had rushed on with the work but I am wiser now and realize the inherent difficulties of translating lyrical pieces such as my own. . . . I am extremely doubtful if I would have the patience now to go through my translation all over again and effect improvements" *(Selected Letters* 444). Tagore's unhappiness with his translations of *Gitanjali* continued all his life, often fueled by others. Without any doubt *Gitanjali* launched Tagore officially as a bilingual author in 1912. And the publication of *The Collected Poems and Plays* only confirmed his identity as Rabindranath Tagore rather than Robi Thakur. *The Collected Poems and Plays* came into existence in 1936, becoming the main introduction of Tagore to English readers, containing plays and poems that he translated from 1912 onwards. There is nothing, ironically, in the book indicating it to be a translation from Bengali, and the names of any editor or anyone who might have assisted in the translation process are absent. The book does not even give any indication that Tagore was a Bengali writer. Perhaps by 1936 in some corner of Tagore's mind he had accepted his fate as an English writer. The book, however, as many critics say, became "a tombstone on Tagore's English literary reputation" *(Selected Letters* 443).

By 1936 Tagore had completely lost his merit as a poet writing in English, though his prose fiction and essays on social issues in English became popular. And superficially all readers, familiar with Tagore's Bengali poetic work, *should* completely agree with his thoughts to Edward Thompson about his translations: "I have done gross injustice to my original productions partly owing to my incompetence, partly to carelessness" (Mukherjee 120)[17]. One just cannot help sympathizing with the world poet's obsession, and with the failure and fall of his translatability of *Gitanjali*, resulting from the socio-historical situation, his own beliefs about translation and reception in the west, and the mixed influence of his admirers. Yet one wonders if the "gross injustice" that Tagore himself talks about nonetheless helped him in illustrating his own concept of "vishwa sahitya" – a critical literary piece, which highlights Tagore's position as a critic, poet, translator, humanist, and theorist that will assist us in understanding the gain *Gitanjali* experiences in translation.

Tagore the critic

To fully appreciate *any Gitanjali*'s gain in translation we need to take a special look at Tagore's journey as a critic and inaugurator of "vishwa sahitya" or what Goethe would have called "*Weltliteratur*." Tagore's position as a literary critic, obvious in "vishwa sahitya" essay, is generally overshadowed by his status as a creative writer. Yet as Sisir Kumar Das says in *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings on Literature and*

[17] *Translation as Recovery*

Language, he is undoubtedly "one of the makers of modern Bengali criticism and among the most perceptive critics in the language, if not the best" (1). The first phase of Tagore's career as a literary critic began in 1888 with the publication of his first book *Sanalochana* (Criticism). Most of the essays in this collection addressed issues related to poetry and poets. In this collection, Tagore almost privileged one kind of poetry. His criticism perhaps had a specific function with respect to his own creative activities as a poet, rather than a more general significance. The second phase of his career as a literary critic, which began sometime in 1907, is perhaps more productive than his first. According to Sisir Kumar Das, it is in 1907 that Tagore truly entered the intellectual debate on literary theory and world literature.

With the publication of his essays collected in *Sahitya* (Literature), from which his "vishwa sahitya" is taken, Tagore liberated criticism from the restrictions of all structured approaches to literature and personal art, contrary to his beliefs in the early phase of his career. His concept of literature, literary theory, and the function of art became deeply rooted in the etymology of "sahitya," the Sanskrit word usually translated as "literature," though "sahitya" does not have the same resonance as the word "literature" in English. Unlike "literature," which loosely means anything written and printed, "sahitya" simply means "togetherness" and harmonious "coexistence." In Bharata's drama treatise *Natyashastra*, one of the oldest theoretical works in Sanskrit reflecting on the nature and concept of art, the author emphasizes that art, unlike the four Vedas, is democratic and social in purpose; art integrates within itself music, dance,

poetry, composition, and acting so as to appeal to everyone while instructing through pleasure. Rabindranath Tagore extended and revitalized that concept by propagating that the true function of literature and art was to ensure the relationship between human beings.

The "vishwa sahitya" essay summarizes Tagore's highest ideals about literature and art. Describing the function of art and literature as connecting and establishing love within and between each other as some sort of divine play, where the "play of making the world one's own and expanding oneself in the world" becomes bigger than everything else, Tagore advocates a literature which all men may "recognize" as "belonging to themselves" (qtd. in "Comparative Literature in India" 8). Let us bear in mind that Tagore was successful in *speaking* to the English-speaking world in his version of *Gitanjali*'s translatability. Indeed, according to him, unlike Goethe, viewing literature as "belonging to a particular person, place, or time, is not to see it truly." Literature can only be understood if humanity of all time is seeking expression. Tagore considers artists and authors to be under some sort of divine frenzy, people who are perpetually engaged in building, "dismantling," and "rebuilding" literature for a superior honor and order. This literature he calls as "vishwa sahitya" or "world literature," where humanity as a sinner, enjoyer, self-conqueror is found in different moods and circumstances. Indeed, the purpose of traversing "world literature" is to know how truly humanity has succeeded in establishing "intimate relations with the world at large" or how far it has come to realize the truth about itself (qtd. in "Comparative Literature in India" 9).

Vishwa sahitya and *Gitanjali*

In *The Idea of World Literature*, John Pizer argues that Goethe emphasized the term "world literature" in 1827 following the collapse of Napoleon's imperial ambitions in Europe, to project the role of literature as an instrument for peace and cross-connections between nations. Tagore, too, under the nomenclature of "vishwa sahitya" advocated universality, and interactions between literatures across and within nations. Like Goethe whose paradigm of *Weltliteratur* is rooted in Germany's historical and political ethos of the 1820s and 1830s, Tagore's concept of "vishwa sahitya" stems from the colonial realities of his times. When Goethe began addressing the issue of *Weltliteratur*, Germany was not a politically unified country, and he saw in literature the universal elements that could bring nations and communities together. Similarly, when asked to deliver a lecture in 1907 at the inauguration of National Council of Education, whose function was to provide a channel for modern education outside the curricula and system shaped by British interests, Tagore launched the idea of "vishwa sahitya" or "world literature" to combat the petty provincialism of regional literatures in multilingual India.

Suggesting that the highest function of human intellect consists in "forging bonds with others," in "vishwa sahitya," where the transcendence of the self results in a discovery and union with the other, Tagore sees love and joy at the heart of such an endeavor. He rhetorically asks, "What is the bond of joy? It is nothing but knowing

others as our own, and ourselves as other. Once that knowledge is achieved, we have no more questions. We never ask, 'Why do I love myself?' The very sense of my own being gives me joy" (*Selected Writings* 139). In a way, by giving a translatability that connected the local with the national and the global, Tagore had made his Bengali/English *Gitanjali* no longer his own, but the world's. For Tagore, this joy can only be found in literature, which has the capacity to acquaint us with "humanity's wealth and abundance" (*Selected Writings* 146).

Even as they echo Vedantic and Upanishadic philosophy, Tagore'sideas sound similar to what the seventy-seven-year old Goethe had said to his young disciple Johann Peter Eckermann in 1827: "I am more and more convinced . . . that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men . . . I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand. . ." (qtd. in *What is World Literature?* 1). Through their respective concepts of "vishwa sahitya" and "*Weltliteratur*," both Tagore and Goethe highlight the ineffectiveness of parochial regionalism or nationalism that ignores the cross-cultural connections between languages and literatures. Emphasizing these connections, Goethe had said that "our novels, our tragedies. . .come to us from Goldsmith, Fielding and Shakespeare" (qtd. in Dasgupta 57). Tagore too had said that "the creative vitality of Bengali literature" comes from its "power to assimilate cultural influences from outside."

Writing in a highly philosophical and symbolic language, which is very near to his creative works, in his "vishwa sahitya" essay Tagore calls literature the unifying force that brings together the reader and the writer, the nation and the world, the ancient with the modern. The concept of 'togetherness' was central to Tagore's literary theory; he had rejected outright the doctrine of art for art's sake, and the individual artistic freedom. For him, literature represents the highest form of communication and connection with one soul to other for the *sahit* (general good) of humanity. In his *Yurop Jatir Dayari*, Tagore had said that universality could only be applicable to literature, which crosses the barriers of national taste to reach the common ground of human communication. Tagore had unequivocally declared "An international feast is only possible in the realms of literature," and by the time Tagore delivered his lecture on "vishwa sahitya" he was already thinking of translating his *Gitanjali*, whose function as Tagore imagined was in bringing "East and West together" (qtd. in Dev Sen 133-4). Certainly his *Gitanjali* became a manifestation of his "vishwa sahitya." *Gitanjali* caught Tagore in one of his most religious and spiritual modes. The intellectual milieu in which *Gitanjali* appeared in Europe was also a critical phase. The shadow of the First World War was hanging on the horizon; *Gitanjali* perhaps soothed the tense spirits, and Tagore was welcomed as the prophet of peace from the East Tagore, too, heartily accepted his role, as he proudly wrote in his *Reminiscences*, "East and West met in a friendship in my person" (qtd. in Dev Sen 115).

But just as translation of Bengali *Gitanjali* in English raised questions about Tagore's translational practices, the essay on "vishwa sahitya" brings us to a new debate that Tagore launches as a critic. When asked to deliver a lecture on Comparative Literature to the Indian National Council of Education in February 1907 in Calcutta, Tagore opted to *translate* comparative literature as "vishwa sahitya." The National Council of Education aimed to destabilize the intention of the Governor General of British India to divorce wealthy Indians from their native traditions through English education. In his speech to the Council, Tagore launched the idea of Comparative Literature as World Literature:

> I have been called upon to discuss a subject to which you have given the English name of Comparative Literature. Let me call it World-Literature in Bengali.
>
> If we want to understand man as revealed in action, his motivations and his aims, then we must pursue his intentions through the whole of history. To take isolated instances, such as the reign of Akbar or Queen Elizabeth, is merely to satisfy curiosity. He who knows that Akbar and Elizabeth are only pretexts or occasions; that man, throughout the whole of history, is incessantly at work to fulfill his deepest purposes, and to unite himself with the All, it is he, I say, who will strive to see in history not the local and the individual, but the eternal and universal man… Likewise, what really claims our attention in World-Literature is the way

> in which the soul of man expresses its joy. ("Comparative Literature in India" 3).[18]

Comparative Literature would translate as "tulnatamak sahitya" in Bengali, but Tagore opts instead for "vishwa sahitya," rejecting the nomenclature "comparative literature." For Tagore "tulnatamak sahitya" or "comparative literature" is too narrow, and carries with it the implication of comparing isolated events rather than seeing them as locally and globally connected. Further, it is possible that the word "comparative literature" had a negative hue for him as it involves an explicit "comparison" between national literatures, where "the isomorphic fit between the name of a nation and the name of a language" needs to balance the "singularity of untranslatable alterity against the need to translate *quand meme*" (*The Translation Zone* 243). Indeed, for Tagore "comparative literature" is too confined a term as it undermines the organic connections between and amongst all literatures of the world, locally, globally, and nationally.

Although Tagore begins his essay by emphasizing a supranational universality of literature, he then proceeds to give a much more particular account, grounded in the land:

> What I am trying to say amounts to this. Just as this earth is not the sum of patches of land belonging to different people, and to know the earth as such is sheer rusticity, so literature is not the mere total of works composed by different hands. Most of us, however, think of literature in what I have called the manner of the rustic. From this narrow

[18] Translated by Buddhadev Bose.

> provincialism we must free ourselves; we must strive to see the work of each author as a whole, that whole as a part of man's universal creativity, and that universal spirit in its manifestations through World-Literature. Now is the time to do so ("Comparative Literature in India" 4).

Here, Tagore has significantly modulated the universalism of his approach, as he is not using neutral metaphors when speaking of the earth not being the "sum of patches of land belonging to different people" and of literature as not being "the mere total of works composed by different hands," but a mode to see each work as a whole and yet part of something very particular.

To understand the implications of these metaphors, we should recall that the birth of the National Council of Education took place at a tumultuous time when the British administration had divided the state of Bengal into East and West Bengal, on the pretext of the region's unmanageability. The real motive of the British, however, was to separate Hindus and Muslims in two different geographical regions, with the Muslim population predominating in the Eastern part of Bengal. Tagore is countering this policy by using the ecological metaphors of earth and land, emphasizing the organic connectedness that exists beyond geographical – or religious or linguistic – boundaries when it comes to literature and other art forms. Furthermore, by saying that "literature is not the mere total of works composed by different hands," Tagore is underscoring the mobility and dynamic nature of "vishwa sahitya." He says that "we must strive to see the work of each author as a whole, that whole as a part of man's universal creativity, and that universal

spirit in its manifestations through World-Literature," and in this way he is accentuating the unique adaptability of "vishwa sahitya" to attune itself to the rhythms of its newly found home ground across and within nations and languages. Tagore's *Gitanjali* is one such example of "vishwa sahitya," which enables us to view (un)translatability through comparative world lenses. A few local and global examples with reference to *Gitanjali*'s (un)translatability will illustrate my point.

Tagore locally and globally in the modern world

Before Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize, his poetry was little known in Indian languages other than his native Bengali, though his prose had been translated into English and other Indian languages. By 1914 his short stories were being included in Indian colleges and schools, but his poetry was still less widely known. The self-translation of *Gitanjali*, and the fame that came with it, changed the local and global dynamic. Tagore had brought a new kind of melody to Bengali poetry by manipulating and breaking long Sanskrit words. Inspired by Tagore, the Hindi enthusiasts, especially the chayavaadi (shadow) poets, took that as cue to alter Hindi verses at the metrical level. Ramchandra Shukla, an important critic of Hindi literature, had dismissed the entire chayavaad movement for producing "soft" lyrics that were close to the ones composed by Tagore. In her *Mahadevi Varma and the Chhayavad Age of Modern Hindi Poetry* (1983), Karen Schomer illuminates the power Tagore's poetry held for modern Hindi poets, who read, admired, and imitated him. Namvar Singh, an important critic of the chayavaad

movement, while explaining the versification of chayavaad poets in his *Chayavad*, observes that certain words such as "swapna," "sneha," "komal," "tan," "mangna," replete in Tagore's poems, had found entry in Nirala's verses.

Further, many critics like Schomer argue that the first modern poetic movement in Hindi, chayavaad, had a profound impact after Tagore's English *Gitanjali* won the Nobel Prize by creating a sense of national pride and admirations. Most of the chayavaadi poets, however, were well-acquainted with the Bengali language, and took to the task of emulating the Bengali *Gitanjali*'s versification and content in their works. As Schomer writes:

> [T]he Chhayavad generation of Hindi poets found themselves powerfully attracted by the emotional tone of *Gitanjali*, and this was reflected in the poetry they were writing: the softness that entered the diction of Hindi poetry at the time can hardly be explained without reference to the Bengali model. Some of the poems that Prasad wrote around 1919 were directly influenced by *Gitanjali*, while Mahadevi mentions *Gitanjali* with the same kind of familiarity as she does the *Ramayana* of Tulsidasa (24).

A whole generation of Hindi poets came under the influence of Tagore. And for most of them the lyricism and subjectivity of Bengali *Gitanjali* were unparalleled. Certain important Hindi poets like Suryakanta Nirala, Pant, and Jai Shankar Prasad, who have continued to capture the attention of modern readers with their poetry, had read Tagore's *Gitanjali* in Bengali. Nirala, in fact, went so far as to have argued in his essays about

following and bringing the Bengali meter into Hindi poetry. In his own poems he went on to experiment with the looser meters of Bengali and turned to free verse. He was severely criticized by Pant publically, who admired Tagore a lot but explained in his preface to *Pallava* (Leaf) that the two languages differ in terms of treatment of their long and short vowels. Hindi has a marked distinction between the two while Bengali does not, hence it was impossible to bring the melodious meters of Bengali in Hindi. The key factor in these debates is that the world-wide success of Tagore's questionable English *Gitanjali* led Hindi writers to a new engagement with his Bengali original, which thus gained a new life not only *in* translation but *via* translation in the original as well.

If modern Hindi poetry was touched by Tagore's Nobel Prize for his English *Gitanjali*, the rest of the Indian languages were not far behind. But it is curious to note that after Tagore won the Nobel Prize, a number of translations were made into Indian languages from his English *Gitanjali* – not from the Bengali original (*Translation as Recovery* 118). Tagore's fame in Kerala, the southernmost state of India, is also overwhelming. In "The Impact of Tagore and his Works on Kerala Life and Literature," Ayyappa Paniker expresses that more than "forty works have appeared as translation . . . six are multiple translations of *Gitanjali* in various forms." Yet Tagore's entry into Indian languages was slower than his popularity in European languages. Tagore visited Kerala for the first time in 1922 (Paniker 422). By then he had been to Europe twice. Further, the first translation Hindi of *Gitanjali* appeared in 1921 (Schomer 24). Within a few years after Tagore translated his *Gitanjali* into English, by contrast, he was translated into

German, Spanish, French, and Danish. In fact, during the years 1914-1924, there were more translations of *Gitanjali* in German than in Hindi, more in Spanish than in Nepali, more in French than in Kannada. One would have expected *Gitanjali* to be translated into Hindi and Assamese before Telugu, which is geographically farthest from Bengal. But the first lyric translation of *Gitanjali* into Hindi only appeared in 1921, fourteen years after the first Telugu translation. On the other hand, the decade since 2000 has seen more translations of *Gitanjali* into Hindi than into any other Indian language. Of all the translations of *Gitanjali* in Indian languages, Hindi, whose start was weak in the beginning, now has the most *Gitanjali*s. Even with this boom in Hindi translation, surprisingly, the number of translations of *Gitanjali* into Spanish surpasses those into Hindi.[19]

As early as in 1915, Tagore's fame had reached countries like Chile. Gabriela Mistral admitted being influenced by the Bible, Tagore, and Tolstoy. Pablo Neruda came under Tagore's influence as well, and his famous poem "En mi cielo al crepúsculo eres como una nube" (poem# XVI) in *Veinte Poemas de Amor y una Canción Desesperada* (1924) bears strong similarities with Tagore's song in Spanish "Tú eres la nube crepuscular del cielo / de mis fantasias," poem # XXX of *The Gardener* (Ketaki 66). By 1920 there were so many translations of *Gitanjali* that it no longer remained a Bengali poet's work. It became – as Tagore said in the "vishwa sahitya" essay while describing the purpose literature – "the work of each author as a whole, that whole as a part of man's

[19] Data taken from *Translation as Recovery*

universal creativity, and that universal spirit." Octavio Paz thinks in his "Los manuscritos de Tagore" (The Manuscript of Tagore) that Tagore's popularity in Latin America cannot solely be explained by the affinities that exist between the Latin American world and the "Indo-occidental baroque" of the Bengali or the fact that he was from the orient. He says in his essay that the true explanation of Tagore's success lies in the magnetic power of his poems. The younger generation read them with same fervor with which their grandparents had read great romantic poetry a hundred years back. He further adds in the essay that an entire generation of Mexico grew reading an anthology prepared by the educator José Vasconcelos in 1920, which included the translated works of Tagore along with Dante, Cervantes, Plato, Tolstoy, and Goethe. He points out that the paradox of poetry is that it is universal and at the same time untranslatable.[20]

In an article called "The Invention of an Andalusian Tagore," Howard Young brings a new perspective to Tagore's reception in Europe and Latin America:

> Rabindranath Tagore's fortunes in the Spanish-speaking world defy simple summarization. First of all, one must acknowledge his enormous popularity; extensively translated and widely reprinted, Tagore's books have sold better than many Spanish-language poets. During World War II, long after Tagore's idolatry faded in Europe, Latin Americans, including members of the working classes in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile,

[20] http://www.departmag.com/archive/6th_issue/rabindranath_tagores.html

> continued to read *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener*, and in Spain today poets still compete for the Rabindranath Tagore prize for poetry. (Young 42)

Tagore's influence in Latin America has been enormous. Octavio Paz in his "Los manuscritos de Rsbindranath Tagore" says, "Las relaciones entre Rabindranath Tagore y la América Latina han sido multiples, complejas y apasionadas"'[The relations between Rabindranath Tagore and Latin America have been multiple, complex and passionate] (Paz 146) . As Paz mentions in the article, Tagore was the first substantial acquaintance from the "orient" for the Latin Americans. Unlike in countries like France and Germany, Tagore's association in Latin America cannot be studied in watertight compartments, as it was a connection between two continents, where multiple people were involved at different layers in the process of reception and translation.

A look at Tagore's presence in Latin America unavoidably leads to his most visible association with Victoria Ocampo, who single-handedly and consistently published his short stories, poems, and essays in *Sur* and *La Nación*. A rich correspondence between the two had ensued once Tagore returned to India after living for some time in Ocampo's house in Argentina. Just after his trip Tagore wrote and dedicated a collection of poems for her. In a letter written in October, 1925 that accompanied the book *Purabi* (From the East) Tagore wrote to Ocampo:

> I am sending to you a Bengali book of poems which I wish I could place in your hands personally. I have dedicated it to you though you will never be able to know what it contains. A large number of poems in this book were written while I

was in San Isidro. My readers who will understand these poems will never know who my Vijaya is with whom they are associated. I hope this book will have the chance of a longer time with you than its author had (*In Your Blossoming Flower-garden* 417).

It is a well-known fact in Bengal that the two had struck up a deep friendship. Just a quick glance at one of the letters will reveal the nature of their relationship. The following letter was written by Ocampo to Tagore:

San Isidro. Jan 15. 1925

Gurudev (a thousand times dear…):

I must admit that I miss you too much. It is becoming quite uncomfortable, quite inconvenient, because I can't think of anything else. But I won't bother you with sentimental descriptions of my feelings [. . . .]

Your letter from Río arrived this morning [. . . .] To look at that envelop was a joy you can't even imagine (though I know your imagination is vast).

So, at last, you understood Baudelaire through my armchair!. . .I hope that you may understand, through the same piece of furniture, what the lyrical meaning of my devotion is! [. . . .]

You did not give me the last poem you translated here (about the flowers). Please, ask Leonard to copy it for me (when he leaves off star-hunting).

I am working at your *Red Oleanders*. And though it will still make you more conceited than you already are, let me tell you, Gurudev, that I love you […]

> One of my friends in Italy, Dario Niccodermi writes plays and stages them. He would be much impressed by *Red Oleanders* [. . . .] (*In Your Blossoming Flower-garden* 395-7)

The letter is replete with sentiments that show a strange mix of literary and personal interests. We also hear that Ocampo is working on *Red Oleanders* by Tagore. The reference to the armchair in the letter is again personal yet has literary connections. On hearing Baudelaire's poems and their praise from Victoria Ocampo (or "Vijiya," as Tagore preferred to call her), he had described Baudelaire a "furniture poet." Later when Tagore was returning to India, Victoria Ocampo had sent an armchair with Tagore to humor him. In return, Tagore had shipped a fine silk sari to Ocampo. Indeed, Ocampo remained Tagore's faithful publicist in Latin America for her entire life. The archives of *La Nación* and *Sur* reveal that Tagore had robust life in a far away country while he sat, as we are told by Tagore's son in a letter written to Ocampo after his death, in "the chair" that she had provided him (Dyson 463).

If Argentina became the land, after the success of *Gitanjali*, where Tagore's muse "Vijiya" lived, for many Spanish and Latin American poets Tagore became the new oriental artist and philosopher to follow – even after his fame had declined in Europe. The first Spanish translation of Tagore's *Gitanjali* was prepared by Zenobia Camprubí from English, with Juan Ramón Jiménez's assistance. The duo had fallen in love with each other while translating Tagore, and remained the single most ardent translators of him, with no fewer than twenty-two Spanish versions of his work in their name from

1915 to 1965 (Young 42). The translations of Tagore by the couple were warmly received by critics and readers alike. In fact, the demand for Tagore translations inspired other translators to enter the competition, and despite the warning that appeared after 1917 on the books translated by the couple: "Único traductor autorizado por Rabindranath Tagore para publicar sus obras en espanol" [The only translator authorized by Rabindranath Tagore to publish his works in Spanish], the pirated translations of Tagore books only increased.

Howard Young is right in pointing out that Tagore's success worked "as a two-edged sword for his Spanish mediators." On one level the couple received steady five to ten percent translation royalties from Macmillian, and on the other while Tagore's books sold in the thousands, and Juan Ramon Jiménez had to accept "the fact that his books collected dust on shelves" (43). Although the simplest reason for Tagore's success in Spain could be what Gerardo Diego succinctly describes: "su palabra en nueva lengua de Castilla y Andalucía penetra hondamente en el santuario de muchas almas de nuestro extremo occidente"[21] (qtd. in Young 283), Howard Young points out that the early translations done by the couple reflected in tone, style, and diction "the best of Juan Ramon Jiménez," whose "own preoccupations with the dualities of earth and sky, finite or infinite were similar to Tagore's." Young further adds that if Tagore was a poet who had translated his poems in a foreign mode of speech, keeping it close to the Edwardian diction, Jimenez on the other hand was a poet "translating into a language whose

[21] His word on new language of Castilla and Andalucia penetrates deeply into the sanctuary of many of our far western souls.
(Thankful to Saptaswa Basu for helping me with the translation).

dominant lyrical discourse he had helped to fashion"(44). Tagore's vision in "vishwa sahitya"of freeing literature from the hands that create it is visible in Jiménez's work. Further, as discussed by Graciela Palau de Nemes in "Tagore and Jiménez: Poetic Coincidences" while translating English *Gitanjali* into Spanish, Jiménez might have been influenced by the seventh poem: "My song has put off her adornments" – in putting forward his concept of "naked poetry."

Curiously to note, soon after the Jiménez couple brought out their translation of *Gitanjali* in 1915, a rival translation, *Gitanjalí: poemas místicos*, became available in Mexico in 1918, rendered by Pedro Requena-Legarreta with a prologue by Joaquín Méndez Rivas. Unlike the Jiménez translation, which didn't address any problems encountered by the translators in rendering Tagore's English verses into Spanish, the prologue by Méndez Rivas tells us that Requena-Legarreta encountered two obstacles while translating. Firstly, the poems were not an *exact* translation from the original, even when translated by the poet himself, something that the Jimenez version didn't stress to his readers. And secondly, the poems had their roots in Upanishad philosophy and mysticism. Méndez Rivas tells us how Requena-Legarreta overcame these outcomes:

> Para salvar tales sirtes, Requena gasto muchas horas en el estudio de los principios de la teologia que dio origen a la obra primordial y aun llego a escurdrinar la dispersa filosofia de los upanishad. Conjuntamente, analizo el ritmo, la cadencia, los valores prosodicos y la metrica del Bengali, que es idioma escencialmente eufonico y propocio a la rima. A esto puede atribuirse que las

composiciones en espanol esten mas apegadas al original, a cuyo efecto le sirvieron a Requena los datos que el mismo Tagore le dio en varias entrevistas en Nueva York (x).

Literal translation of the above quote:

To save such hidden meanings, Requeña spent many hours in the study of the principles of theology that gave rise to the primordial/fundamental/primary work and even scrutinized the dispersed/scattered/unfocussed/diverse philosophy of the Upanishads. Along with this, she analyzed Bengali rhythm, cadence, prosodic values and meter, which is essentially a euphonic language and propitious to rhyme. This is why the Spanish compositions are more attached/closer to the original, to the effect the information/data/facts that Tagore himself gave Requeña in several interviews in New York was/were helpful to her.[22]

Interesting to note here that we are told the translator had several interviews with Tagore in New York, and gathered prosodic and metrical knowledge of Bengali by familiarizing himself with Upanishidic philosophy and theology. Let us compare poem number three in Jimenez and Requena's translations with Tagore's English number three to see the afterlives of the Bengali and English versions.

Jimenez:

¿Cómo cantas Tú, Señor? ¡Siem-
pre te escucho mudo de asombro!
La luz de tu música ilumina el mun-
do, su aliento va de cielo a cielo, su

[22] A special thanks to Ashwini Ganeshan for providing the translation.

raudal santo vence todos los pedregales
y sigue, en un torbellino, adelante.
Mi corazón anhela ser uno con tu canto, pero en vano busca su voz. Quiero hablar, pero mi palabra no se abre en melodía; y grito vencido. ¡Ay, cómo me cojes el corazón en el enredo infinito de tu música, Señor! (19).

Requena-Legarreta:

Yo no sé como cantas, dueno mío;
Asbsorto escucho tu cancíon diviana;
Mas de tus cantos el sonoro río
con nuvea luz los mundos ilumina.

El aliento vital de las cadencias
de tu música, tienda el libre vuelo,
y llevando por puras transparencias,
vibrando surca desde cielo a cielo.

De tus himnos sagrados el torrente,
como el que cruza la feraz llanura,
vence obstáculos mil, y, en la pendiente,
el curso de sus ondas apresura

Mi corazón seguir tu voz ansía
Aunque es inútil su constante brega:
si hablarte consiguiera, te hablaría;
Pero el llanto mis súplicas disgrega.

Tagore:

I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amazement.
The light of thy music illuminates the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.

> My heart longs to join in thy song,
> but vainly struggle for a voice. I
> would speak, but speech breaks not into
> song, and I cry out baffled. Ah, thou
> hast made my heart captive in the end-
> less meshes of thy music, my master!

Amazingly, the Requena-Legarreta version has a structural similarity with the Bengali original (referred in the beginning of the chapter) which also has four stanzas, though the first and last stanzas are more like couplets. Also, Requena-Legarreta's version is a literal translation of Tagore's English poem, with a strong influence of the aesthetics of modernismo, especially in terms of the dynamicity in the poem. Jiménez's version closely follows Tagore's English translation. Requena-Legarreta's version uses archaic words such as "feraz," probably following the Edwardian diction of Tagore's poem, whereas Jiménez's version doesn't. Moreover, unlike the Jiménez translation, which is formal from the very beginning (with the opening line (¿Cómo cantas Tú, Señor?), the intensity of formality in Requena-Legarreta version increases throughout the poem and culminates with the final line, "Pero el llanto mis súplicas disgrega," absent in the Bengali version. Both poems are a healthy afterlife of English version, but unlike Bengali, which was able to conceal theology, the identity of the speaker, and gender, Spanish is as helpless as English. But perhaps, there is no need to compare the Spanish versions with Bengali, as they owe their life to the English translation or rewriting done by the poet himself.

Conclusion

Calling Rabindranath Tagore's translation a "case" that "warns us" against authors becoming self-translators, Sujit Mukherjee says:

> What the author-translator has to offer may depart so far from the source that the reader is not given access to the original. Also, when an author translates his own work, he attempts the reader to the uncharitable thought that perhaps nobody else cares enough about this author's work to translate it. An act of translation is always a compliment, a recognition of some special merit in the original work, and authors should probably await this recognition from others (25).

Tagore did depart from the Bengali *Gitanjali* in his English renditions, and created a translatability that worked well for his reception both locally and globally at the peak of his career. But it is unfair to say that Tagore's case is a warning. As we saw, Tagore can be close to the originals, either his or others. Plus, the religious translatability that we see in his English *Gitanjali* is an effect that he had wanted.

Tagore became Tagore because of his self-translation. His English *Gitanjali* became the muse for his creative work on prose poems in Bengali, while thanks to the success of the English *Gitanjali* the Bengali *Gitanjali* had a strong influence on the Hindi chayavaad poets after Tagore won the Nobel Prize for his translations. The English *Gitanjali* took Tagore beyond places he could have ever imagined, not just in Europe which was relatively accessible due to colonial rule, but to countries like Argentina, Mexico, and Chile in the global south. Tagore's case is thus not a warning but a case to

study (un)translatability and their multiple registers for the new comparatists who are often torn between the discipline's local and global needs. If world literary studies, as some suggest, is the ultimate trajectory comparative literature will take, then we have a lot to learn from Tagore, as we explore *Gitanjali*'s fate locally and globally, the politics and intentions of Tagore's self-translatability, and his strategic deployment of "vishwa sahitya

Chapter 3 Comparative Poetics: Gabriela Mistral and Mahadevi Varma

My love, tell me, are you a man or woman?
They both ask me if you are gentle or harsh
How could I reveal your secrets to those
who use you for their desires?
–Jai Shankar Prasad, *Amsu*[23]

Although in "The Task of the Translator" Benjamin argues that works can be translated because of their inherent "translatability," he also says that not all works are translatable, but claims that even "if men should prove unable to translate them" (70), translation should be carried out. For Benjamin, translatability is the potential of a text to find a new life in another language by giving just a hint of its previous form, revealing an elusive world simultaneously comprehensible and incomprehensible, depending on the position of the reader, the worldliness of the text, and the work of translator. Translatability has perhaps very little to do with fidelity. Poetry in this respect, as we saw with Tagore, gives an important case for study, since its aesthetic value is often tied to its perceived (or simply assumed) untranslatability. Poetic untranslatability is mostly ascribed to the fact that no two languages are the same. Hence the French "pain" and German "Brot" despite referencing the same object – bread – are phonetically and visually different, and the objects to which the terms refer can have different histories associations in each language. No wonder Robert Frost's "poetry is what is lost in translation" is axiomatic for the hesitant reader or critic of poetry in translation. Certainly Tagore shared this belief, and suffered from it too.

[23] *Amsu*'s epigraph translated by Rubin in *Of Love and War* page # 3

Nevertheless, a comparative poetics based on the principle of understanding and analyzing the registers of translatability and untranslatability, created by translators, critics, and poets themselves, could be employed to analyze poetry in translation in the local and global frameworks. To use such a poetics, instead of looking at translatability as an intrinsic quality of a particular text, as Benjamin would say, we need to look at translatability as a relational category and worldly concept, dependent on the linguistic act that the reader and translator think or imagine the text to be imitating. These "imaginary" linguistic acts refer the translator or reader to cultural and literary significations to mould translatability and untranslatability in the global and local traditions. In this chapter I will explore this dynamic by juxtaposing the evolving translational history of the poems of Gabriela Mistral and Mahadevi Varma in English. Juxtaposing the "translatability" of the two authors, one globally renowned and the other not, complicates what constitutes (un)translatability in "local" and "global" literary systems in terms of gender, race, genre, translation, and international movements. Further, putting the translatability of the two diverse poets, with no common affiliation to the linguistic and literary traditions, caters to the spirit of the comparative literature, which is simultaneously local and global. The chapter will conclude by suggesting that a comparative poetics of (un)translatability requires the reader to be as sensitive toward the target language as to the source language, and opens comparative avenues to different poetic traditions of the world in translation, creating dynamism in literary canons in the spirit of Tagore's "vishwa sahitya."

One of the major hesitations for translating poetry is the emphasis given to the formal aspect of language – the rhyme, rhythm, phonetics, alliteration, etc. – which led Tagore to feel that his lyrics couldn't be translated. Although the formal aspects in prose are arguably as important as in poetry, the conventional expectation of giving more attention to poetic form has often caused poetry to suffer from neglect by theorists, as evident in Jonathan Culler's observation of the lack of theoretical models for lyric. But any theory of translation – in any genre – based only on the formal aspect of language is bound to fail. Octavio Paz once said, "our neighbors do not speak and think as we do," and thus we cannot expect an exact photocopy of any word or sentiment ("Translation: Literature and Letters" 154). Further the conventional expectation of paying more attention to the formal devices in poetry is nothing but an "agreed" expectation, as observed by Culler himself in his *Structuralist Poetics*. Culler points out in his book that poetry is less about the properties of language and more about the strategies of reading. A lyric can become more lyrical when it uses the principles of narrative and drama in its constructed world, and by its creative use of the space on the page. Stressing "the fact that a text is a poem is not the necessary result of its linguistic properties," Culler emphasizes that attempts "to base a theory of poems [on the formal aspect] seem doomed to failure" from the very beginning (190). The same is true for poetry in translation.

The "situation to which we appeal" in a poem "is not that of the actual linguistic act but that of a linguistic act which we take the poem to be imitating – directly or deviously" (193). This does not mean that one can divorce sound from words, or music

from poetry, it only means that replicating the sound of the words in another language is not only impossible but is not necessarily the dominant factor in poetic effects even in the original. From the very start, thus, the poetic constructs developed between the poet and the reader become semantic signs floating in the amniotic fluid of worldly possibilities. As I will argue via Mistral and Varma, a poem's (un)translatability depends on internal and external deictics, or words whose references are dependent on the context in which they are said or written, and on their literary and cultural significations in the local and global literary systems. I will suggest that rather than giving up the discipline's focus on reading in the original language (at a time when European languages no longer exclusively occupy the center of the curriculum), we should direct our attention to the question of translation itself, and looking at deictics provides a good way to reconsider the various registers of "translatability." Poetry becomes an ideal testing-ground in this regard, since it is the prototype of the untranslatable (and hence, in the current regime, the unteachable) text.

Gabriela Mistral's translatability as "Gabriela"

Translators and translatability cannot be divorced. Translators are nothing but molders of the "translatability" of poets and their work. Acknowledging the importance of translators in molding the translatability of a poet or their work, André Lefevere calls translators the artisans of compromise in his *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame.* Translators are constrained by their temporal and

geopolitical position, by the literary traditions of "target" and "source" language, and by the individual features of the languages they have to work with. Despite these constraints, like critics, historians, and anthologizers, translators are "image makers," and exert power to subvert textual content, alter the literary canon in local-global framework, re-write literary traditions in "target" language, and provide accessibility to cultures under the guise of objectivity. Recognizing the significance of the translators as "image makers" in rendering Gabriela Mistral in English, Stephen Tapscott, a translator and critic, succinctly puts across the nature of Mistral's translatability and its evolution in his book *Selected Prose and Prose-Poems: Gabriela Mistral* (2002) as:

> Our familiarity with Mistral's reputation as a vast "maternal" force does actually register the history of her reception in Spanish and in English, the latter mediated by Doris Dana's important and generous *Selected Poems* of 1971; anticipated by Langston Hughes's *Selected Poems*. . .and complemented by later specific translations, including Christine Jacox Kyle's elegantly musical, biblically inflected *Poems of the Mothers* (1996) and Maria Giachetti's helpful *Gabriela Mistral: A Reader*. . .and mythologized in many essays that claim her on behalf of various sociopolitical positions (236).

Indeed, Mistral's subsequent afterlives in English as a maternal figure, feminist, and poet are anticipated, supplemented, and complicated by various translations and critical frameworks of their times. The first person to translate Gabriela Mistral in English was Langston Hughes. He translated her after a gap of seven years after she won the Nobel

Prize. Unlike Tagore who had received the Nobel Prize for his "profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill," he had "made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West," Mistral was chosen "for her lyric poetry which, inspired by powerful emotions," had "made her name a symbol of the idealistic aspirations of the entire Latin American world" (Nobel Prize citation)[24]. If Tagore's *Gitanjali* became a part of Western literature, Mistral's name symbolized and was translated as embodying the highest aspirations for the entire Latin American world – and even perhaps for the globe – after the tragedy of the Second World War. A reverberation of idealistic Mistral's eulogization in the Nobel Prize citation can be seen in an article devoted to her in *The New York Times Book Review* after her death, where Mildred Adams says that "Gabriela's clarity and precision, her passion and that characteristic which can be called her nobility of soul are accepted as ideals. She will not quickly vanish from the literary consciousness of those who value the Spanish tongue" (qtd. in Hughes 12). Notice the use of the first name by Adams.

Ironically, Mistral, unlike Tagore, had won the Nobel Prize because of her translatability in a Swedish afterlife. As noted by Norberto Pinilla in his *Biografía de Gabriela Mistral* (1946), an article published in 1941 by Ivan Harrie in a Stockholm newspaper had predicted Mistral's likelihood of winning the Nobel Prize, after the eighteen members of the jury had made a sensational discovery of Mistral through the Swedish translations of Hjalmar Gullberg, a poet, and also one of the Nobel Prize jurists

[24] http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1945/

the year Mistral won the prize. In fact, in the words of Irving Wallace, Gullberg had fallen so much in love with Mistral's poetry that he "translated all of it in Swedish" and single-handedly swayed the "entire vote" (qtd. in Leverence 404).

Incidentally, when Gullberg introduced Mistral to the Swedish Academy at the Nobel Prize ceremony, he addressed her as the Selma Lagerlöf of Chile. Calling Mistral the "young colleague of Miss Lagerlof of Marbacka," Gullberg said that from a provincial little school teacher Mistral had become the "spiritual queen of Latin America" (Hughes 14). He was referring here to the similarities between the individual journeys of Mistral and Sweden's Lagerlöf, the first woman poet to win the Nobel Prize. Like Mistral a devoted country school teacher, Selma Lagerlöf wrote for children, and was also later known to be intimate with a woman. Certainly, it is difficult to overlook the similar biographical critical lenses with which Mistral's work has been analyzed, prized, and translated. Even more interesting in Gullberg's introduction at the ceremony is his presentation of the motivating force behind Mistral's poetry:

> It was there, at the age of twenty, that her destiny was fulfilled. A railroad man worked in the same village, and a passionate love affair developed between them. We know little of their story. We are cognizant only that he betrayed her. One day in November, 1909, putting a bullet through his temple, he killed himself. The young woman became disconsolate. Like Job, she cried aloud to the skies that had allowed this to happen. From that valley lost in the barren, burning mountains of Chile came a voice that men heard far and near. A banal tragedy of

> every day life lost its private character and became a part of world literature. It was then that Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga became Gabriela Mistral. This provincial little school teacher, this young colleague of Miss Lagerlof of Marbacka, was to become the spiritual queen of Latin America (qtd. in Hughes 14).

The dramatic introduction by Gullberg is almost in the vein of telenovelas, where a young Mistral's poetic output results from a great passionate heartache and a personal tragedy, unjustly plotted by the gods. And perhaps, Mistral would not have become "a part of world literature," and her voice would not have reached men "far and near," according to Gullberg, either in "translation" or in the "original," had she not been so unfortunate – had her lover not betrayed her, and had he not ended his life. Clearly, it is the myth of the personal tragedy that connects her spiritually to the world's sufferings and that culminates in the birth of her poetry's the translatability.

Another critic, Marie-Lise Gazarian-Gautier, describes Mistral's journey towards the moment of fame in her book *Gabriela Mistral, The Teacher from the Valley of Elqui* as: "While Gabriela lived through her personal tragedy, the dawn of peace lit up the world, and with that peace Stockholm began to look again at Chile and at the poetry and work of the woman who had sung the love of the weak and the oppressed in her yearning for social justice" (81). Note that the author again addresses the poet by the first name, as if suggesting familiarity, affection, and informality. Further, by juxtaposing Mistral's "personal tragedy" with the peace that came after World War II Gazarian-Gautier transposes the two, much as Gullberg had done in his address.

Complicating the association of the private and public with respect to Mistral, Stephen Tapscott justifiably objects to calling Mistral by her first name, as it "sounds condescending, even patronizing in an egregiously gender-based way" (235). At the same time we must, however, remember that Mistral self-named herself, and perhaps assisted in creating her own myth of "translatability." Mistral's translatability as "Gabriela," however, is very different from Rabindranath Thakur's journey as "Tagore." Tagore self-translated his work to create his translatability, fortunately or unfortunately. Mistral developed hers without indulging in any kind of literary self-translation. Her first name, however, becomes a synonym for maternal and spiritual translatability in literary traditions, recontextualizing and adding layers of semantic meaning to her work like deictics in language, essential in understanding poems.

Observing the relevance of deictics, in his chapter on "Poetics of Lyrics" in *Structuralist Poetics*, Jonathan Culler stresses that deictics such as the context-dependent terms "I," "you," or "here" appeal to us because they contextualize a poetic discourse, which we think the poem to be imitating, directly or deviously. Indeed, we appeal to models of human personality and human behavior in order to construct referents for the pronouns, but we are aware that our interest in the poem depends on the fact that it is something other than the record of an empirical speech act – or formal linguistic pattern. This aspect of the poetic function is best observed in the ways in which our expectations about the lyric alter the effects of deictics or shifters (193). Further, if we say that the

lyric is not heard but overheard, we are simply using this fiction, arrived at after contextualizing deictics as interpretive device. Consider the following stanza:

> And she said to me:
> "Climb the mountain.
> I never leave the meadow.
> Cut the snow white flowers,
> the tough and tender ones;
> make them mine." (Trans. Gitchetti 94)

The listener or reader is invited to hear a conversation's fragment. The stanza begins with the conjunction – "And" – suggesting that we are already in medias res. But who is the "me" or the "she" here? Why does the "I" never leave the mountain? Why does the "I" want only the "snow white flowers"? And what does the "I" mean by saying "make them mine"? Why is the "me" of the poem telling us all this? Is the "me" really telling us or there is another listener involved? As readers we are clueless. Yet the drama in the stanza is enough to hold our attention. The snow white flowers, the strange demand, the relationship between the poetic speaker in first person and the "she," all work to make the stanza poetic. Further words such as "cut," "tender," "meadow," "mine," "tough" evoke several images in the minds of the readers.

On its own, however, the stanza is ahistoric, apolitical, disconnected from its literary tradition, and does not say anything beyond the fact that there exists an intriguing relationship between the speaker, the listener, and the one who demands the white flowers. We are free, thus, to give rein to our imagination. Now if we find out that the above stanza is actually the second stanza of Mistral's translated poem "La flor del aire," and that it comes from the series "Historia de loca" in her volume *Tala*, the parts that

made the readers clueless give the readers/listeners enough fodder to attach the stanza synchronically and diachronically to a number of significations – the poet, the time, the tradition, the language, the translator, and the local and global traditions. The stanza now becomes a referent to a number of signifiers. Yet that which made the stanza potentially poetic in English still exists, even if we now know that there is another rival version of it in Spanish. Certainly, Culler is absolutely correct in stressing that the state of poetry is dependent on how the deictics are contextualized. But deictics are not always confined to the structure of a language; they can also become cultural and literary referents, especially for translators and readers. Hence, the choice made by Mistral's translator above depends on the way she read and accepted the deictics in that particular poem; while as readers we now have more information. In the course of the chapter, I hope to show how the deictics in Mistral and Varma's poems, and the cultural and semantic significations that their names inspire, been utilized by their translators in creating, and perpetuating the two poets' (un)translatability.

Langston Hughes's "Gabriela" and the other translators

Mistral's literary connection with the United States began when her first poetry collection, *Desolación*, was published in 1922. A group of North American Spanish teachers, and the director of the Hispanic Institute in the United States, Federico de Onís, were responsible for the publication. As the "Introduction" tells us, the publication was a gesture of homage to a "writer of the first rank, in whom the Spanish spirit speaks with

new vigor and voice." The book undoubtedly laid down the foundation of Mistral's fame. The actual collection, however, of her translated poems in English came out in the year 1957, almost a decade after the Nobel Prize, and more than three decades after the Hispanic Institute in the United States first published her.

It was Langston Hughes who translated Mistral on Bernard Perry's request for the Indiana University Press. He says that he agreed to attempt the translations simply because he "liked the poems" (11). Mistral's dearth of English translations could also have been a motivating factor for his interest in the translation task. Moreover, by the time Hughes decided to translate Mistral in English, he himself had established a strong position in the Hispanic literatures via his translated poems in Spanish. In fact, his "I, Too" had become a focal point of reference to connect the two Americas together for the Hispanic intelligentsia. A cursey look at the poem would give the reason of its popularity in the Americas:

> I, too, sing America.
>
> I am the darker brother.
> They send me to eat in the kitchen
> When company comes,
> But I laugh,
> And eat well,
> And grow strong.
>
> Tomorrow,
> I'll be at the table
> When company comes.
> Nobody'll dare
> Say to me,
> "Eat in the kitchen,"
> Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed--

I, too, am America (9).

Translating Mistral was hence also a way to pay homage to a language and literary traditions that had embraced him so affectionately. No wonder, as mentioned by Ryan James Kernen[25], a large collection of Hughes' work is found today in Santiago.

Expressing disbelief at Mistral's unavailability in the English language, Hughes writes in his Introduction that "Although her first publication was achieved in our country, in Continental Europe her poems were more widely translated than in England or the United States. Even after she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, why so little of Gabriela was translated into English, I do not know" (10). But Hughes himself does not say anything about his own first encounter with Mistral's poetry, despite being adept in Spanish, and his very strong ties with Latin American countries, including his exchange of letters with Neruda, who was Mistral's student. Note, however, that Hughes' famous poem, "I, Too," by 1957 had been translated and published in various literary magazines. A version of it by Jorge Luis Borges also appeared in *Sur*, whose patron Victoria Ocampo was a great friend of Gabriela Mistral. By 1936 *Nueva Cultura*, one of the chief organs of Spanish Republican cause, had called Langston Hughes "el poeta negro de la Revolución" (the black poet of the Revolution) (Kernan 47).

[25] Dissertation

Further, according to Edward Mullen, Hughes' prominence in the Hispanic world, and the presence of Hispanic motifs in his own work, rose from his complex socio-historical, and racial position (Mullen 15). Hughes' translations of Gabriela Mistral stemmed to a great deal from his own desire to be recognized as the poet of the blacks. He was keen to popularize equality and justice among races, as was Mistral, who often considered herself a racial mix, though recent scholarship on race and gender has shown her ideas confined to her own times. Yet Mistral's humanitarian work, and her political connection, must have appealed to Hughes. Mistral's consistent portrayal of herself "as the spokesperson of Latin America--which she referred to as "our race" [*nuestra raza*]--posing as the mixed-race mother of the nation" (Fiol-Matta 491) had impressed Hughes, especially because she was well known for her defense of the indigenous peoples of Latin America. Further, Hughes' interest in expressing and translating the black experience – or the underrepresented – especially the "other" half of the America – the "I, Too" – spoke well with Mistral's poetic and literary ideology. In fact, in his "Greeting, Good Neighbors" (1945), Hughes laments that people in the United States know very little about their neighbors in Latin America. Addressing himself as an "American of Negro blood," Hughes emphasizes a strong cultural and literary exchange between North and South America. He says that

> we of Negro America would like to have the pleasure of welcoming here Nicholás Guillén, great Cuban Negro poet; of knowing better the brown-skin Diego Rivera, Mexican Indian painter, who once told me he had a Negro grandmother; and of

> receiving from Venezuela and Brazil, from Trinidad and Panama, many other dark-skinned representatives of the Latin cultures whose names are not known in this country (*Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs* 252).

Observe how the color of the skin is transposed into literary exchange and stressed in the above quote. Interestingly, the essay ends with Hughes' poem, "I, Too," and the declaration that it has been published in several avenues in Latin America, emphasizing a strong connection between the Americas.

Ironically, Langston Hughes thought of Mistral's poetry as "simple" and in a "direct language, never high-flown or flowery, and much easier" to translate than "most poets writing in Spanish" (10). While wondering about the absence of Mistral in English, Hughes enlightens his readers on his own selection process: "For the most part I have selected from the various books those poems relating to children, motherhood, and love, including the famous *Poem of the Son* and *Prayer* written during her period of complete desolation, after the man for whom she cared so greatly had died by his own hand" (11). Hughes strengthens the legacy of a "poetess in distress" by including poems of profound sadness while completely disregarding complex and difficult poems such as "Locas Mujeres." Speaking about translating Mistral, while taking refuge in the translator's impossible task, Hughes says that he has "no theories of translation," and only translated such of Mistral's poems as he could render in the literal content, emotion, and style of each poem in English. Poems like *Sonetos de Muerte* are very beautiful, according to Hughes, but are "difficult in their rhymed simplicity to put into an equivalent English

form." Further, to "give their meaning without their word music would be to lose their meaning" (11). Till now Hughes is the only translator to have attempted a prosodic translation of Mistral.

Curiously, the selection and treatment of Mistral's poems in Hughes' collection shows an excessive dependence on biographical criticism and gendered analysis that covertly simplifies Mistral's oeuvre, and ignores her other fascinating poetic output. Hughes does mention in his introduction Mistral's diplomatic sojourns, her travels, and most importantly the details regarding her connection with the United States, and the information that she died in the United States. Yet a poem like "La extranjera," which highlights the fear of death of a foreign woman in exile is absent from Hughes' collection:

> Y va a morirse en medio de nosotros,
> en una noche en la que más padezca,
> con solo su destino por almohada,
> de una muerta callada y *extranjera*.
>
> And here among us, on some night
> of fearful agony, with only her fate
> for a pillow, she'll die
> a silent death, a *foreign* death. (192-3, Tr. Ursula K. Le Guin).

Having portrayed Mistral as a simple and passionate woman, Langston Hughes raises the question of why she should be translated by a man like himself. He says that her poetry was so "intensely feminine" that he "hesitated to attempt translations," himself "hoping that a woman would do so," but since no woman had ever done a volume of translations of her work, he took on the task (10). Throughout the introduction Hughes switches

between calling Mistral by her first name or her full name. He emphasizes her name in the dramatic opening to his introduction, referring to Mistral in the third person:

> "She did not sign her poetry with her own name, Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga, because as a young teacher she feared, if it became known that she wrote such emotionally outspoken verses, she might lose her job. Instead she created for herself another name – taking from the archangel Gabriel her first name, and from a sea wind the second. When the poems that were quickly to make her famous, *Sonetos de la Muerta*, were published in 1914, they were signed Gabriela Mistral (9).

The reference to the archangel almost foreshadows the rigorous religious analysis Mistral's poems have undergone. Like Gullberg, Hughes too, describes the journey of Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga transforming herself into Gabriela Mistral in hyperbolic and theatrical language, heightened by the use of the deictic – third person pronoun "she."

The "Gabriela" that Mistral created and others perpetuated

The legacy of calling Mistral by her first name – and what it demands the reader to contextualize and translate – can be traced back to one of the oldest articles published on her in the United States, just after she had won the Nobel Prize. Margaret J. Bates, while reviewing Mistral's poems in her article "Gabriela Mistral" (1946), systematically analyzes her poetry under the categories of "motherhood" and "biblical." Like Hughes, Bates also calls Mistral by her first name. In another separate article, also called

"Gabriela Mistral," written by Aurelio Macedonio Espinosa in 1951, Mistral, instead of just being referred by the first name or in the third person pronoun becomes the possession of a collective pronoun – "our." Mistral's poems, again, in the article are suggested as an expression of "deep disappointment and sadness" that "our poetess" suffered (6). Mistral, however, also perpetuated her myth. Creating her own image of a poet in distress, toward the end of her book *Desolacíon*, in "Voto" or (vow) Mistral says:

> Dios me perdone este libro amargo, y los hombres que sienten la vida como dulzura me lo perdonen también.
>
> En estos cien poemas queda sangrando un pasado doloroso, en el cual la canción se ensangrentó para aliviarme. Lo dejo tras de mi como a la hondonada sombria y, por laderas mis clementes, subo hacia las mesetas espirituales donde una ancha luz, caera, por fin, sobre mis dias. Yo cantared esde ellas las palabrasde la esperanzas, in volver a mirar mi corazón; cantaré como lo quiso un misericordioso para "consolar a los hombres." A los treinta afios, cuando escribi el "Decilogo del Artista," dije este Voto.
>
> Dios y la Vida me dejen cumplirlo en los dias que me quedan por los caminos (243).

Translation:

> May God forgive me for this bitter book, and may men who feel the sweetness of life also forgive me.

> In these hundred poems bleeds a painful past, in which the song stained itself in blood to relieve me lives. I leave it behind me like the gloomy/dark hollowness. I climb towards the spiritual plateaus where a broad/large light will fall/shine, finally, on my days. I will sing from them the words of hope to look back at my heart; I will sing as a merciful one wanted in order to "comfort men." When I wrote the "Commandments of the Artist," I made this vow.
>
> May God and Life let me fulfill it in the days that I have left on the roads.[26]

Indeed, Mistral quite humbly and apologetically looks at her poems as springing from her painful past life. But she promises the reader to renounce her subjectivity, to sing songs generated from her spiritual plateaus, to console the hearts of humanity without looking at her own heart. Reading Mistral's above words from *Desolación,* it is hard to undermine the bibliographical criticism her poems have received, along with the kind of translatability her work has experienced and incited in literary and cultural discourses, which at times has not been very conducive for translatability on terms other than those dictated by her mythic image.

In his article "Arte de Disparidades y de Confluencias: Reflexiones sobre la Traducción de la Poesía de Gabriela Mistral al Inglés" (1997), Rodney Williamson compares the dearth of Mistral's translation in English with the prolific translations of Neruda, and raises an important question: why are Mistral's translations in English so

[26] Thankful to Aswhini Ganeshan for helping me with the translation.

few compared to Neruda's? To this question, he replies: "la doble marginación de Gabriela – por poeta, y por mujer" [double marginalization of Gabriela, as she is a poet and a woman] (159). To the present a total of seven books on Mistral's poems in English are available; the first was published by Langston Hughes in 1957, Doris Dana in 1971, Marjorie Agosin in 1993, and Jacox Kyle in 1995. Three recent translations of Mistral were published in 2002, 2003, and 2008 respectively by Stephen Tapscott, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Randall Couch. On the other hand Pablo Neruda, almost a contemporary of Mistral, has had a robust afterlife not just with prolific translations in English, but in other languages. With seven translations in Bengali, five in Hindi and Tamil, two in Gujarati and Punjabi, Neruda has made a place for himself even in Indian languages. And yet no one calls Neruda "Pablo!"

Mistral's scanty translational history in English could be connected to the ease with which she is called, and translated as "Gabriela." Further, the perception that she is a poet of children and mothers, with a voice of sentimentality and frustrated motherhood, has rendered her ineffective in the literary realm. Mistral's own acceptance of the Nobel Prize in the name of children and women of the Southern hemisphere does not help either. In the words of Max Daireaux, Mistral is often looked as "a moral influence that works mysteriously on the heart and the mind (*Audacious Traveler* 180), more than as a literary artist. Moreover, when Mistral is not a spokesperson for the downtrodden or the spiritual guru of the world, she is treated as a poet of anguish and pain. These sentimental, simplistic portrayals don't help readers or translators themselves to respond

effectively to the real complexities of Mistral's work. And Mistral's style, as Enrique Lihn has said is "without precedent . . . and without heirs" (Agosín and Giachetti 20).

In the introduction to the bilingual edition of fifty-six different poems by Doris Dana in the *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral* (1971), which came out after a hiatus of more than a decade from Hughes,' Margaret Bates compares Mistral with the great symbolist poet Antonio Machado. Like Machado, Mistral's apparently simple poetic utterances are backed up "by subtle, complex, hidden machine that extracts from each word, from each sound and accent, its maximum emotional charge. This type of poetry, because of the complexity beneath the surface, is the least translatable" (xv). Bates' observation sounds similar to what Bose had noticed about Tagore's mellifluous *Gitanjali.*

Compared to Hughes, Doris Dana avoids any prosodic effects in the first bilingual translation of Mistral. She includes verses that had not been previously translated in English and attempts to showcase a diverse range of subject matter in Mistral's poetic style. Unlike Hughes' collection, Dana translates Mistral's works from her four major collections: *Desolación* (1922), *Ternura* (1924), *Tala* (1938), and *Lagar* (1954) – often called the more profound work of Mistral. Additionally, the Translator's Note explicitly states the intention of the work: "If this book helps to bring Gabriela Mistral's poetry to your attention, and if it contributes in any way to your desire to read more of her work, preferably in the original, I shall have accomplished my purpose" (xxvii). Further, she stresses the importance of the bilingual presentation of the poems by quoting Stanley

Burnshaw, who had said that the instant a reader "departs from the words of the original, he departs from its poetry. For the words are the poems. An English translation is always a different thing: it is always an English poem." Hence, to remind the reader that Mistral's poems are in Spanish, not in English, Dana urges her readers to refer back to the original available in her book as much as possible, and to read "aloud even if you don't know Spanish. For the poem is also the sound, and that simply cannot be translated" (xxvii).

Indeed, as pointed out by Randall Couch in his "Translating the Hidden Machine," the selections in this collection, when compared to Hughes' selections are "darker" and more "philosophical" (183). Dana Doris herself in the translator's note says that she has tried to honor fidelity to the original without falling into attempting to metrically translate Mistral's poems in another language – a task that is near to impossible. Though we are never told what constitutes fidelity while translating Mistral or any poet, she does tells the reader that her translations are an attempt to showcase many facets of Mistral's poetry and the developing poetic maturity in her works, and hence has avoided translating works that have had an afterlife in English before.

Such difficult poems could not make headway against the myth of the simple, spontaneous Gabriela, and another twenty years went by before anyone attempted another volume of translations into English: *A Gabriela Mistral Reader* (1992) by Maria Giachetti. Following Dana's footsteps, Maria Giachetti renders Mistral's poems in non-metrical translations, but also includes Mistral's prose for the first time, perhaps in

connection with the feminist critique of its time. Marjorie Agosín, the editor of the anthology, calls Giachett's translations skillful where the reader can "perceive the glimmering words of Andean and Indian American woman, a defender of the poor, a defender of the poor, the perpetual stranger" whose individuality "forged by postponement" can be discovered in the collection. Emphasizing Mistral's prose and chiding scholars' negligence towards it, Agosín laments that Mistral's prose and political writings, compared to her poetry, are unknown outside Chile. She blames the "male-dominated press" that "has tended to regard her work as that of an eccentric feminist" (22). "This anthology," Agosín claims, fills a void in the English translations of Mistral, as it contains a vast array of her works that "exemplify the variety and originality of her intense literary production" (23). The anthology includes a wide selection of Mistral's works from poems, prose, vignettes, political texts, and literary criticism that even the most "daring critics have never tried to discover" behind the myth of a teacher's "unschooled" and "unrestrained" words (Agosín 22). Further, as observed by Agosín in 1992, to date Mistral's complete works had not been edited. Certainly, this anthology creates a new trend in Mistral's scholarship, perhaps aligned with postcolonial and gender studies of the 90s, by including her prose selections such as "A Profile of the Mexican Indian Woman," "Something about the Quechuan People," "Alfonsina Storni," and "An Invitation to the Work of Rainer Maria Rilke."

The inclusion of Mistral's essays in the book adds a complex layer to her work. Essays like "A Profile of Mexican Woman" and "Something about the Quechuan People"

try to establish racial harmony and equality. Thus for instance, the latter illuminates the fact that poets have not praised the Indian woman, who is very much akin to the biblical Ruth and the Moabite. Further, an essay such as "An Invitation to the Work of Rainer Maria Rilke" shows Mistral's awareness about hegemonic literary canons when she says, "I do not believe in the Latin monopoly of masterworks," and she argues that the intellectual capitals have moved "from Russia to India, Europe to France, and the United States" (Agosin 212). These essays reveal a Mistral who goes beyond the "Gabriela" of Hughes's generation. Moreover, unlike previous anthologies, Agosín and Giachetti do not refer Mistral by her first name – a welcome change. In fact, they recognize the fictional element in her biography and the contradictory images her work inspires – of familiarity and of perversion.

The "Introduction" tells the reader that Mistral was very Chilean and provincial, and yet she spoke a universal language. Calling Mistral one of the most original voices of Latin America, Agosín prophesies that her "work will always walk the edge between the ordinary place where she created her own myth as rural schoolteacher and the place where she allowed herself the luxury of being the delirious woman of free fantasy, especially in the group of poems titled "Mujeres locas" from the book *Lagar*" (21). Indeed, by giving Mistral agency and recognizing the political, social, and feminist undercurrents in her work, Agosín's anthology breaks free from the previous "translatable" stereotypes. The translator, too, in her "Translator's Note" connects the urgency of reading Mistral's work with the political ideology by expressing that many of

the works presented in the anthology "have vanished like the heart of the rain forest." Certainly, it is interesting to see that Mistral translations show a life of their own, and illustrate what made them "translatable" at a particular historical and literary moment in space.

Ursula K. Le Guin's "Gabriela Mistral"

The most recent collection of Mistral's poems, *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral* (2006) by Ursula K. Le Guin, has an impressive introduction that further departs from the old stereotypical image of the translatable "Gabriela." Out of Mistral's four hundred poems the book contains a hundred and sixty-four. Accepting the selection process as "subjective," Le Guin says that personal taste and "prejudice" led her to and away from certain poems, yet she emphasizes that it is difficult to describe the process of "finding the translatables and the untranslatables. Love and language lead where they will" (xxii). Unlike Hughes, who had abandoned the poems he found difficult, Le Guin mentions having consciously chosen "many of the dark, difficult poems," especially from the later books of Mistral. She also notes that although Mistral's *Desolation* is a remarkable book, it is probably not the best introduction to Mistral for a twenty-first-century reader. Certainly, the tone and sentiments in *Desolacíon* are completely different from the later mature Mistral, especially in poems from "Locas mujeres." Le Guin is, therefore, right in pointing out that "the 'Gabriela' they gave us is all cliché—a blighted romance then a lifetime of tears. . .a sexless schoolmarm yearning over children. . ." (xx),

a figure whose identity is too much based on *Desolacíon.* The ellipses in the sentence only highlight the unsaid myths associated with Mistral in connection to the legend and translatability of "Gabriela."

Unlike most translators and editors of Mistral's work, especially the early ones, Le Guin is thus careful not to perpetuate the older myth based on Mistral's biographical details. On the contrary, Le Guin asserts that she knew nothing about Mistral when a friend of hers sent Mistral's paperback book from Buenos Aires. "I read it and fell in love," she says, and this "book is the result, the love-child" (xix). Le Guin suggests that the reason for not knowing Mistral has nothing to do with the language divide, or the North-South problem. In fact, she makes a shocking discovery about the limited accessibility of Mistral's work in Chile itself:

> The four books of poetry published during her lifetime came out in New York, Madrid, Buenos Aries, and Santiago de Chile. A posthumous "Nobel" edition of the books was published in Spain , and there is a Chilean *Poesias Completas* (Editorial Lord Cochrane, 1989); both are out of print, and I have never even seen the latter. For the four principle books, the paperback single-volume edition from the Editorial Porrúa in Mexico is the only one available in this country. The *Poemas de Chile,* first published posthumously in Spain, can be found in a Chilean paperback edition. Palma Guillén de Nicolau, who writes the excellent introduction to the Porrúa volume, writes that the uncollected prose might fill three or four volumes. There has never been a scholarly, annotated, or variorum

> edition of the poems. Mistral's uncollected poems have never been brought together (xx).

One wonders about the reasons for Mistral's eclipse in local and global traditions, both in the original and in translation, and what could that absence reveal about the translatability of her poetry. Le Guin thinks that Mistral's (un)translatability is directly dependent on the image her translators, critics, and she herself created. Having been adulated as a poetess, Mistral has not been analyzed as a poet, and not adequately translated. Le Guin's understanding of Mistral thus connects to her awareness of her own social position and literary career, in which writing, gender, and literary popularity are connected. In her essay "Introducing Myself" in *The Wave in the Mind* (2004), Le Guin highlights how the category of woman is invented. An invention, however, even with a genius behind it, she says, has to find a market. Equating market and literary sensibilities, she says that models like "Austen, and the Bronte were too complicated," and "Woolf was way ahead of her time" yet people just laughed at them (3). It is perhaps for this reason that she introduces each poetic collection of Mistral in the anthology by contrasting or comparing her with a famous male poet: T. S Eliot, Neruda, Yeats, Shakespeare to name a few.

In the "Foreword" to Le Guin's *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral*, V. B. Price writes that had Mistral been alive she would have "taken pleasure in her poems being translated by Ursula K. Le Guin" (xiii). Price further says,

> Mistral devoted herself ardently to both poetry and a spiritual commitment to liberty and civilization through education and service as alternatives to barbarism.

> In her many novels, Le Guin continually explores new and freer ways of being human, alternatives to crippling structures of prejudice and ideological myopia. Neither Mistral nor Le Guin are utopianists, but both believe in the redeeming and progressive value of communication, which inevitably involves translating from one's own reality to the reality of another (xiii).

Price connects Le Guin's interest in translating Mistral with her political and progressive ideas. However, unlike Hughes, Le Guin offers a new insight between creativity and translation. In an email interview given to Susan Bernardo, Le Guin expressed the connection between language, poetry, and translation. Calling all writing a translation, Le Guin says that translation involves the considerable but not insurmountable difficulty of translating from a language that doesn't exist. The language that does not exist for her is in actuality the words in a poem or story that need to be brought into existence from non-existence, very much like bringing across meaning literally to understand different people or cultures (Bernardo 7). No wonder Le Guin expressed her very personal feelings for translating Mistral in her poem, "For Gabriela Mistral" from *Sixty Odd* (1999), where the epitaph of the poem is written in Spanish:

> En el Valle de Elqui, ceñido
> de cien montañas o de mas. . .

> Forty years beyond her mortal years
> she came back to me, to our Pacific,
> she came here, she
> who sank the meek and blinded saint
> in the glory of the lord of angels
> and a gust of the craziest wind.
> She stood on his northern shore

where gulls whirled like torn paper
and said in the language that I spoke
before I spoke words, "Come!"

"Come!" she said, standing
heavy-bodied and rough-voiced,
deep-breasted as the hills:
"I came north, but you didn't know me.
I've gone home now to the valley
encircled by a hundred mountains,
a hundred mountains, maybe more.
You must come and you must learn
my language."

If I walk south
with the ocean always on my right
and the mountains on my left,
swimming the mouths of the rivers,
the estuaries and the great canal,
if I walk from high tide to low tide
and full moon to new moon, south,
and from equinox to solstice, south,
across the equator in a dream of volcanoes,
if I walk through all the Tropics
past bays of amethyst and bays of jade
from April spring to April autumn, south
and cross the deserts of niter and asbestos
with the sea silver on my right
and a hundred mountains on my left,
a hundred mountains, maybe more,
I will come to the valley.

If I walk all the way, my poet,
if I can walk all the way,
I will come to you.
And I will speak your language (12-3)

The above poem is dedicated to Mistral, who literally appears as a ghostly figure, after her forty mortal years, summoning Le Guin in the hauntingly monosyllabic word "Come" to perform the impending task of learning Mistral's language, as suggested by the

obligatory word "must." The poem is a dialogue between a dead and a living poet, rendered possible because of the literal and metaphoric journey the two poets must experience. The dead poet already made her journey to the "north," the living poet did not know her then. The living poet must now make a journey across time and space to reach the deceased poet's valley, to know her and speak her language. Despite the journey being arduous and long, and rendered uncertain with the conditional clause "if," used twice in the stanza, Le Guin's address of Mistral as "my poet" personalizes the journey across language and geography, concluding the poem in a positive harmony with the line: "And I will speak your language."

Curiously, Mistral's own poem "País de la ausencia" seems to be a prequel to Le Guin's "For Gabriela Mistral," as here we hear about Mistral's journey in the nameless country:

A Ribeiro Couto

País de la ausencía,
extraño país,
más ligero que angel
y seña sutil,
color de alga muerta,
color de neblí
con edad de siempre,
sin edad feliz.

No echa granda,
no cría jazmín,
y no tiene cielos
ni mares de añil.
Nombre suyo, nombre,
Nunca se lo oí,
Y en país sin nombre

me voy a morir.

Ni Puente ni barca
me trajo hasta aquí,
no me lo contaron
por isla o país.
Yo no lo buscaba
ni lo descubrí.

Parece una fibula
que ya me aprendí,
sueño de tomar
y de desasir.
Y es mi patria donde
vivir y morir.

Me nació de cosas
que no son país;
de patrias y patrias
que tuve y perdí;
de las criaturas
que yo vi morir;
de lo que era mío
y se fue de mí.

Perdí cordilleras
en donde dormí;
perdí huertos de oro
dulces de vivir;
perdí yo las islas
de caña y añil,
y las sombras de ellos
me las vi ceñir
y juntas y amantes
hacerse país.

Guedejas de nieblas
sin dorso y cerviz,
alientos dormidos
me los vi seguir,
y en años errantes
volverse país,

y en país sin nombre
me voy a morir (*Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral* 190-91).

Absence Country

For Ribeira Couto

Absence country,
foreign country,
angel-insubstantial,
subtle sign
dead seawood color;
fog color,
ageless
with no golden age.

It bears no pomegranate,
grows no jasmine,
has no indigo
seas or skies.
Its name,
I never heard its name,
and in a nameless country
I am going to die.

No bridge or boat
brought me here,
nobody told me of it
by land or sea.
I didn't seek it,
I didn't find it.

It's like a story
I learned once
a dream of capture
and breaking free.
And it is my homeland
to live in and die in.

It was born to me
of things not country,
of homelands, homelands

I had and lost,
of the little children
I saw die,
of what was mine
and went from me.

I lost mountains
where I used to sleep,
lost golden gardens
sweet to be in,
I lost the isles
of cane and indigo
and saw their shadows
close in around me
and joining and loving
become my country.

Mist-manes,
Bodiless, headless,
Sleeping breaths,
I saw them follow me
through wandering years
and turn into a country
and in a nameless country
I am going to die (*Selected Poems*. Tr. Le Guin 190-91).

The poem poignantly verbalizes the impending doom that has plagued the speaker's mind of dying one day in a nameless country. In both Le Guin and Mistral's poems, the reader is kept ignorant of the name the country. In Le Guin's poem the nameless country is suggested through the direction "north" and "south," whereas in Mistral's poem it is a country where neither the pomegranate nor the jasmine grows. The motifs of journey, death, and dream are common to both the poems. The dramatic line in Le Guin's "For Gabriela Mistral" – "I came north, but you didn't know me" – seems to have resulted from the ominous situation Mistral had imagined – "and in a nameless country / I am

going to die" – in her "Absence Country." As this example shows, Le Guin's translations of Mistral's poems are entwined with her creative interest in poetry, translation, and language. Clearly, as Le Guin has said elsewhere, "Translating is a way of making a foreign-language poem part of your-self ("About Translating Diana" 10).

Mistral's self-reinvention in *Lagar*

In 1950 Mistral wrote to Adelaida Velasco, "Sí tengo un libro hecho: *Lagar*. . . . Se hará en Chile y lo repartirán muy mal. Pero me han fabricado allá una leyenda de descastada y tengo que darles *Lagar*" (*Cartas* 473), literally translated as "Yes, I have a book done: *Lagar* . . .It will be done in Chile and they will distribute it very badly. But they have fabricated a story there that I'm ungrateful and I have to give them *Lagar.*[27] *Lagar* is Mistral's only book to have been published in Chile. A premonition of *Lagar* is foreshadowed in "Nocturno" from *Desolación*:

> ¡Y en el ancho lagar de la muerta
> aun no quieres mi pecho exprimir!
>
> And in death's wide winepress
> still you will not trample out my breast! (*Selected Poems*. Tr. Le Guin 223).

But by the time she wrote *Lagar*, Mistral had undergone several life-changing and trampling events. Deaths of several loved ones, including her adopted son Yin-Yin, the cruelty of World War II, the Nobel Prize in 1945, and time had given way to a more mature poetry. Despite the personal losses, unlike her first collection, *Lagar* did not

[27] Translated by Randall Couch in *Madwomen.* See page 16.

poeticize and sentimentalize personal agony. The "I" of *Desolación* is transformed into various poetic personas in *Lagar*, speaking from different positions in time and space. The book has a prologue, thirteen sections, and an epilogue. *Lagar* has no prose or explanatory notes such as were present in *Desolation*, *Tenderness*, and *Felling*. Hence, the collection demands an exclusively careful analysis of the poems. Out of all the sections in *Lagar*, the "Locas mujeres" series stands out for their complexity, dramatic persona, ironic vision, and inner turmoil.

In a way, the "Locas mujeres" series undermines the naïve image of Langston Hughes' "Gabriela," and also problematizes the "Gabriela" that Mistral perpetuated via *Desolación*. The poems in this series show the poetic personae as speaking to a wide audience from various social and historical positions in different dramatic disguises to suggest madness as the only response to their unique situations. Just a cursory look at the titles of the poems reveals different states these "mad" women inhabit. But these women, representing history, politics, and common livelihood are not insane per se but show madness as the only response to their extreme situations. The series could be described as dramatic monologues, where the poet under the mask speaks of the fragmented experience of women. Although these experiences belong to a single category of "las locas," a unitary portraiture is impossible because of the dynamicity, synchronicity, and diachronicity in the poems. From a poem like "La Abandonda" or "The Abandoned Woman," where the speaker wishes for the wind to burn her house, to "The Woman Unburdened" who has neither father nor mother, to "The Fugitive Woman" to the

"Prisoner's Woman" to powerful women like Electra and Clytemnestra, to "La desasida," where Mistral fears her creative work as being eclipsed by her work as a spokesperson in the shadow of her own myth (Couch 19), these "madwomen" are wanderers, exiles, helpless, often trapped, and yet also strong women who, according to Randall Couch "resonate in an age of suicide bombers and secret prisons" (2).

Indeed, for these "locas mujeres" the truth comes out only in an altered state of mind where multiple realities converge and exist. Mistral herself had first hand experience of madness in her paternal grandmother Isabel Villanueva. But even the times she was living in were maddening. Madness becomes then an appropriate platform to speak from for a woman who said she was going to die a "foreign death," and who was revered in Chile yet blamed for not visiting her home country enough. Further, as Randal Couch has mentioned in his book *Madwomen*, a translation of Mistral's "Locas mujheres" series, that the various compounds associated with the "loca (loca, letanías, historia de loca)" function to "ironize, or disarm transgressive speech" (20). As Couch says,

> From the mother who prays that her child not grow so that he won't age and die ("¡Que no crezca!" in the "La desvariadora" section of *Tenura*) to Clytemnestra's antiwar tirade, Cassandra's masochistic pledge of love, or Mistral's protestation against her own legend, this rhetorical ploy [ventriloquy] licenses readers to engage the forbidden and thus open a space for cultural critique (20).

Lagar thus becomes a vehicle for Mistral to complicate her older image of "Gabriela" that she had created in *Desolacíon*.

According to Jamie Concha in his *Gabriela Mistral*, Mistral undid her image by writing "La otra," the prologue to "Locas mujeres" (23). "La otra" presents a unique dilemma to the translator via the deictics in poem, as it utilizes surrealistic psychological images to dramatize a self-murder, which perhaps was too daunting a theme to Hughes for his collection that focused on maternal love. Let us take a quick look at "La otra" to see the problems other translators have encountered in translating it, while also understanding the connections between Mistral's work and the translator's moment of choice.

"La otra"

Una en mí maté:
yo no la amaba

Era la flor llameando
del cactus de montaña;
era aridez y fuego;
nunca se refrescaba.

Piedra y cielo tenía
a pies y a espaladas
y no bajaba nunca
a buscar "ojos de agua."

Donde hacía su siesta,
las hierbas se enroscaban
de aliento de su boca
y brasa de su cara.

En rápidas resinas
se endurecía su habla,

por no caer en Linda
presa soltada.

Doblarse no sabía
la planta de montaña,
y al costado de ella,
yo me doblaba. . .

La dejé que muriese,
robándole mi entraña.
Se acabó como el águila
que no es alimentada.

Sosegó el aletazo,
se dobló, lacia
y me cayó a la mano
su pavesa acabada. . .

Por ella todavía
me gimen sus hermanas,
y las gredas de fuego
al pasar me desgarran.

Cruzando yo les digo:
-- Buscad por las quebradas
y haced con las arcillas
otra águila abrasada.

Si no podeís, entonces,
¡ay!, olvidadla.
Yo la maté. ¡Vosotras
también matadla! (124, 126).[28]

English translation of Mistral's "La otra" by Doris Dana

The Other

I killed one of me,
one I did not love.

[28] Taken from Doris Dana's *Selected Poems*

She was the flame
of mountain cactus.
She was drought and fire;
thirstless.

With rock at her feet
and sky at her shoulder,
she never stooped
in search of cooling springs.

Grass shriveled
where she rested,
scorched with her breath
and the blazing coal of her face.

Her words hardened
In rapids of resin
Never freed in the spill
of an open dike

This mountain plant
did not know how to bend
I bent
at her side.

I tore my guts from her.
I let her die,
a starving eagle
left unfed.

The thrash of wing grew still.
She toppled, spent,
and fell into my hands,
wasted, consumed.

Her sisters still lament,
accuses me of her death.
The fiery desert chalk
claws as I go by.

Passing, I tell them,
“Search in the cracks of the earth

and mould from its clay
another flaming eagle.

If you can't, then
forget her.
I killed her. You
kill her, too!" (125, 127).

The poem, as we can see, begins with a self-murder and its gradual description, concluding with a plea for another murder. Indeed, the poem ends with a shocking statement: "¡Vosotras / también matadla!" urging others to indulge in a similar self-annihilation. A quick glance at the poem reveals that its merit lies in creating anticipation, shock, and drama. But translating this poem presents problems that are unique to languages that are gendered. Hence for instance the very title of the poem, "La otra," is the first crisis. "La otra" in Spanish refers to the other, but the "other" here is feminine. Yet we don't know the identity of the feminine "other" throughout the poem. Although the poet compares her to a cactus flower from the mountain, we never hear the words "woman" or "girl" used in Spanish. But the narrative of the poem is such that the reader assumes, perhaps because the poet is a female, and was prefixed to "Locas mujeres," that the murderer and the murdered is a woman.

In English, however, "La otra" can most readily be rendered as "The Other Woman." If the translated poem is supposed to stand as an introduction to the rest of the collection "Locas mujeres," perhaps rendering the title as "The Other" would be desirable. But if the poem was to stand on its own, the plot for the translator thickens. The more literal and correct alternative, "The Other Woman" evokes the unnecessary

expectation of a love triangle in the mind of the reader, not in tune with the overall theme of the poem. Should the translator then render "La otra" as "The Other" in order to keep consistency with the theme of the poem, and the drama that ensues in the poem, by accepting the inevitable gender loss in the translation, and the crucial loss of semantic signification in the overall trajectory of Mistral's work? But then the loss is mitigated by the very first line in the poem, and the title of the series – "Mad Women." Dana Doris and Giachetti translate "La otra" as the "The Other," whereas Le Guin opts for "The Other Woman."

If the title itself poses a crisis in language for the translator, the first stanza of the poem is also not easy to render:

> Una en mí maté:
> yo no la amaba

can literally be translated as:

> One [feminine] in me I killed
> I did not love her.

Doris Dana translates this as:

> I killed one of me,
> one I did not love.

And Giachetti as:

> I killed someone
> inside of me.
> I didn't love her (117).

Although Dana's translation keeps the mystery about the gender, the phrase "one of me," and the repetition of the word "one" in the second line, take away the crispiness and

sharpness of the poem. Further, the "one" in the first line and the "other" in the title become redundant as the reader can easily understand these deictics as referring to the same person – "La otra." And although Giachetti's "I killed someone / inside of me / I didn't love her" reveals that the murderer and murdered are the same – a female subject – the extra "of" in the line "inside of me" could easily be replaced and compressed in one line, imitating the original as: "I killed someone in me." In both published translations, Dana's "one" and Giachetti's "someone" lessen the intensity of the internal drama in the poem.

On the other hand, Ursula Le Guin in her version translates the title "La otra" as "The Other Woman." Unlike other two translators of Mistral, Le Guin not only chooses to translate the title of the poem as "The Other Woman," she maintains the thematic connection with the title and the first line:

> I killed a woman in me
> I didn't love her (226).

The first translated stanza by Le Guin keeps the reader's attention intact via the dramatic acceptance of the self-murder, followed by the reason: I didn't love her. Despite that, the title "The Other Woman" evokes the image of "an eternal triangle." Perhaps the shock and drama in the original poem are enhanced by using a title like "The Other Woman" in English, as it allows the translator to take up the task of the poet in the target language for subverting the conventional expectation of the reader. Further, we know that the poem has a speaker who urges the "sisters" of "la otra" to kill "la otra," hence there are in

actuality three entities involved, or perhaps more since the Spanish "vosotras" has no equivalent in English.

After the title and the first stanza, the second stanza of the poem is perhaps the most important part, as it is intricately connected with the sixth stanza, assisting in associating the murderer and the murdered to one common parentage – the mountain – or Chile. Further, the sixth stanza recognizes and juxtaposes the poetic speaker in "la planta de montaña," with the murdered in the opening line of the second stanza: "Era la flor llameando / del cactus de montaña;" Doris Dana translates the second stanza as:

> She was the flame
> of mountain cactus.
> She was the draught and fire,
> thirstless.

Giachetti translates the second stanza as following:

> She was a fiery flower
> of the mountain cactus;
> she was thirst and flames,
> never stopping for refreshment (117).

In Dana's version, we lose the dramatic image of a flaming cactus flower as in "Era la flor llameando," and the pronoun "she" is the "flame of mountain cactus." Giachetti stays true to the original and keeps the image of a flaming flower. But the last lines of the two versions are clunky. In Dana's version the last line: "thirstless" is short and abrupt, but the word "thirstless" sounds awkward. Perhaps, simply rendering the last two lines as: "She was draught and fire, / never ever in thirst" (my translation) could be an option. "Never ever" keeps the emphasis present in Spanish through the word "nunca."

Moreover, “never stopping for refreshment” sounds unpoetic with the word “refreshment.” Le Guin, however, translates the second stanza as:

> She was the flaming flower
> from the mountain cactus,
> She was dryness and fire;
> nothing could cool her (226).

Indeed, if “she” was dryness and fire, “nothing” would cool her. Le Guin’s version is definitely better than the other two translators in terms of structure and content of the Spanish.

As mentioned before, the sixth stanza connects the murderer and the murdered to a common point of origin – the mountains.

Sixth stanza by Dana:

> This mountain plant
> did not know how to bend
> I bent
> at her side (125).

Giachetti:

> This mountain flower
> did not know how to bend—
> but by her side,
> I bent (117).

Le Guin:

> She couldn’t bow
> the mountain plant,
> while I beside her
> bowed and bent (226).

Mistral uses both the imperfect and perfect tense in Spanish. Both Dana and Giachetti maintain the simple past tense throughout the poem, except "where a participle can be substituted" (Couch 197). Randall Couch points out in his article, "Translating the Hidden Machine," that rendering Spanish imperfect "using the simple past can be appropriate." Dana and Giachetti translate the imperfect "doblaba" as "bent." Le Guin, on the other hand, uses the word "bow" twice. The three translators ignore the ellipses present in the original. Further, in Le Guin's version the agency of the "mountain plant" is less intensified as she emphasizes the inability of the "she" to bend, whereas in the other versions the translators maintain the agency and subjectivity of the poetic speaker by using "This" mountain plant (Dana) or "This" mountain flower (Giachetti). Further, the next line in the stanza seventh: "La dejé que muriese" confirms that "la planta de montaña" or the poetic speaker, or the murderer ought to have agency in the sixth stanza, confirmed by the translations of Dana, Giachetti, and Le Guin as follows

Dana:

I tore my guts from her

Giachetti:

I allowed her to die

Le Guin:

I left her to die.

The death of "she" in the seventh stanza is important as it ties in well with the concluding stanza of the poem, translated by:

Dana as:

> "If you can't, then forget her.
> I killed her. You
> kill her, too!" (127)

Giachetti as:

> If you cannot, then,
> Oh! Forget her.
> I killed her.
> You must kill her, too! (118).

And Le Guin as:

> If you can't,
> well then, forget her!
> I killed her. You, too,
> you kill her (227).

Indeed, the last stanza of the poem brings the reader to the full circle of self-murder in the poem:

> Una en mí maté
> yo no la amaba.

But it is interesting to analyze how the individual translators have translated the last stanza. Dana Dorris makes the last stanza a separate individual dialogue with quotation marks, and refuses to render the exclamation "¡ay!" which only emphasizes the speaker's callousness if the listener doesn't want to "kill her." Giachetti's version "You must kill her, too!" leaves the listener with no option – but to kill "her" – "la otra." And although Le Guin's version uses the "well then" instead of "¡ay!, the use of "you" twice in one line is distracting for a dramatic conclusion. Perhaps the last stanza could be translated as following:

If you cannot, then
oh forget her.
I killed her. You, too,
should kill her.

But despite a careful analysis, and translation of the last stanza, the Spanish "vosotras" in the concluding lines of the poem is lost forever in English, though we do gain an exquisite reincarnation of a Spanish poem, with a rich translational history of Mistral in English. The poem had begun in the past with a reminiscence of an event – the self-murder – and ends in the present tense with an emphatic suggestion of either forgetting or killing "la otra." Susana Munnich has pointed out in her *Gabriela Mistral: Soberbiamente Transgresora* (2005), that the poetic content in this poem is dependent on how words such as "yo," "una" or "otra" are being interpreted (63). Similarly, the choice of words, and the kind of translation made of the poem would depend on how the translator is interpreting deictics in the poem. If the murder is that of an old stereotype of Mistral then perhaps the title "The Other Woman" is best suited after all. The poem then becomes a plea to all the readers and critics to either "kill" or "forget" the other Mistral from *Desolación*. But if the poem is about woman as a constructed category from an ex-colony of Europe, then "The Other" remains appropriate, as it ties the subjective poetic speech with the historical colonial and post-colonial gender discourses in literatures of the world. Further, that the murder or the act of "forgetting" has to be done immediately in the present temporal space highlights how in just a few lines an entire literary or cultural discourse can be compressed in a poem.

In his *Structuralist Poetics*, Jonathan Culler says that the reason we enjoy a poem so much is because it has compressed time in just a few lines. The lyric is about the now, and at the same time about an intense reflection of the past. Hence, as we noticed, in the translated versions, the strength of the poem comes with an effective translation of the poem's "temporality" through the structure of the address, deictics, the internal coherence, and narrative in the poem. Poetry comes alive by reading it strategically, where major operations are applied to verbal objects even when their metrical and phonetic patterns are not obvious. Formal structure and devices are definitely important in poetry, as Jacobson would say, but neither the formal pattern nor linguistic deviations of verse suffice to produce the true state of poetry (Culler 192). As Culler observes, we appeal to modes of human personality and human behavior in order to construct referents for the pronouns, while aware all the time that the interest in the poem is not dependent just on the empirical speech act, but something other.

We saw in the above translated versions that the function of deictic is extremely important when translating poetic content because the deictics help in creating a (non)fictional situation in which the meaning of the poem manifests, while acting as points of departure where worldly questions about knowledge, power, and historical determinants are inscribed. In this respect, the first and second person pronouns become really important in appreciating a poem – and even creating the poem, as poetry is not about fully formed meaning, but half-meanings that inspire more meanings. Further the translatability of poetic constructs, "I" and "you," despite looking simple and singular,

have to be realized in the "original" and in "translation" as plural: first in the poetic space, second for the reader, third in the literary convention, and fourth in the worldly discourse.

Mahadevi Varma – the queen of pronouns

Just as the proper understating of a mythic self behind the name "Gabriela" can become a contextual deictic in the translation of a poem, the deictics in a poem can get re-contextualized as outside referents of cultural and literary traditions. In this respect, Mahadevi Varma, a Hindi poet who might be called the queen of pronouns, is an interesting case for study. Born in 1902, Varma belongs to the chayavaad school (shadow movement) of the modern Hindi poetry, which brought a heightened subjectivity into Hindi poetry. Further, like the Latin American poets of modernismo, the chayavaad practitioners resuscitated the Hindi language, and were crucial in making it the national language of India. Chayavaad was, however, a disorganized movement, and among four prominent practitioners (Prasad, Nirala, Pant, and Varma), Mahadevi Varma was the only woman poet, only belatedly recognized as such (Gupta 26). The movement had a strong influence on subsequent generations, as it stressed on the individual experience and personal emotions as the basis of art. "I" had previously been of little aesthetic value to Hindi literature, which was strongly influenced by medieval devotional sentiments. The poetry produced before the chayavaad movement was dominated by familiar trysts between the mystical and mythical female Radha and male Krishna, where the poet

remained just an observer, mostly anonymous. The chayavaad poets, however, brought intensity and subjectivity to lyrics in Hindi, where the play between the deictic pronouns"I" and "you" transcended the fixed temporal spaces of the *Puranas*, *Upanishads*, and myths (Singh 20-4).

In this respect Varma's work offers a rich mine to analyze, especially because her prose and poetry show a stark division in the use of the subjective "I." While her poetry highlights a play between the pronouns "I" and "You" that is grammatically idiosyncratic and untouched by the political chaos of its time, her prose reflects on the sociopolitical situation in a frequent usage of the pronoun "we." Further the themes that engaged her in prose are very diverse, and often politically charged, compared to her poems that are confined to desire, longing, and sexuality. In her prose Varma spoke directly on woman's education, socio-literary reforms, national language, the role of artist in the society, and other political questions. Unlike her poems where the collective "we" is almost absent, prose helped her to speak in various voices as a woman to establish solidarity. Curiously, in 1942, Varma completely gave up writing poems and devoted herself to prose. Yet she is mostly famous as a poet, "the modern Mira," not as a prose writer despite addressing difficult issues of her times.

Describing the nature of Varma's poems in *The Return of Sarasvati* (1998), David Rubin calls them strikingly original, works that display a "consistently evolving representation of total subjectivity measured against the vastness of cosmic nature with nothing, as it were, intervening – no human social relationships, no human activities

beyond those totally metaphorical ones involving weeping, walking the road, playing the vina, etc" (153). For him, Varma's five volumes of poems create an extraordinary extended epic self, where a "private universe of abstracted emotions becomes objectified and the impersonal cosmos is experienced on the most subjective level so that each in a sense defines and enhances the other" (153-4). Her poems, hence, become a playground of pronouns and deictics, where the play between the poetic "I" and "you" in the temporal space becomes the essence of the poetic content. For instance, the following poem from *Neerja* (Water lily) describes the unique play of cyclic life/joy and death/pain between poetic constructs "you" and "I" in a typical verse by Varma:

"उत्तर "

इस एक बूँद आँसू में
चाहे साम्राज्य बहा दो,
वरदानों की वर्षा से
यह सूनापन बिखरा दो;

इच्छाओं की कम्पन से
सोता एकान्त जगा दो,
आशा की मुस्काहट पर
मेरा नैराश्य लुटा दो ।

चाहे जर्जर तारों में
अपना मानस उलझा दो,

इन पलकों के प्यालो में
सुख का आसव छलका दो;

मेरे बिखरे प्राणों में
सारी करुणा ढुलका दो,
मेरी छोटी सीमा में
अपना अस्तित्व मिटा दो!

पर शेष नहीं होगी यह
मेरे प्राणों की क्रीड़ा,
तुमको पीड़ा में ढूँढा
तुम में ढूँढूँगी पीड़ा! (*Meri Priya Kavitain* 3).

Reply

In this one teardrop
let empires be washed away,
blessings like rain
strew this loneliness;

let the shuddering of desire
stir the slumbering solitude,
on that hopeful smile
let my despair be taken away.

Let your mind in worn-out
stars be entrapped,
within the goblets of these eyelids
let joy overflow;

in my fragmented soul,
pour all compassion,
in my little boundary
erase your essence !

But all this will not end
the play within my soul.
You were found in pain

In you, I will search pain! (my translation)

The poem, as can be seen, is a dramatic address to the poetic "you" in the present, where the poetic self "I" progressively negates the efforts of the addressee in creating joy for the poetic speaker, climaxing in an ironic conclusion of futility of the efforts, as nothing could ever stop the continuous (de)constructive play in her soul. The addressee discovered the "you" in pain, and hence will always look for pain in the "you." Further, the gender identity of "you" and "I" is revealed in the final stanza of the poem, but in the English translation it is lost, similar to the loss Mistral's evocative title "La otra" or the word "vosotras" had experienced in English.

It was this play between the "I" and the "you" in Mahadevi Varma's poems that won her accolades and critical attention, and gave her the title of "the modern Mira," recalling the medieval Hindi poetess who wrote love songs on the theme of separation and union with the divine. Since the theme of Mahadevi Varma's poems centered on the pain of separation from an absent lover, the notion of "the modern Mira" was appealing to the Hindi-speaking public, who could not stomach a female poet's poems on non-mystical subjects. Further, Varma's rebellion against her marriage, a parallel with Mira, and her continuous work toward the social and educational betterment of women in pre-modern India, only encouraged a religious and selfless understanding of her persona and poems, which otherwise were too subjective and intense. But although Mira and Mahadevi Varma's poetic themes are similar, their social contexts, their love, and personal goals are very different from the medieval bhakti (devotional) tradition. In

contrast to her lyrical poems, Varma's prose writings challenge the obscure mystical analysis of woman in separation. In fact, though flattered by the comparison with the medieval devotional poet, Varma had herself life-long resisted the mystical analysis of her poems.

Mahadevi Varma becomes the "modern Mira"

Mahadevi Varma's journey of becoming the "modern Mira" is in contrast with Mistral, since unlike Mistral she did not self-name herself in perpetuating a myth of herself. As Schomer tells us, in 1930, Sahitya Bhavan, one of the leading new publishing houses of Allahabad, had published Mahadevi Varma's first collection of poems, *Nihar* (Mist). After its publication, her poems began to appear in major Hindi literary journals such as *Sarasvati, Madhuri, Sudha.* However, just after a year of her publication of *Nihar,* the editor of Allahabad press compiled and published an anthology of Hindi women poets, *Stri-kavikaumundi,* primarily intended for use in girls' schools. The anthology, nonetheless, generated quite a bit of interest, not just in the Hindi intellectual circles and prestigious magazines such as *Chand*, but also in Calcutta's literary journal *Visal Bharat*.

The introductory essay to the anthology was written by the fiery critic Professor Ramachandra Shukla, who discussed Varma enthusiastically in length, in terms not entirely different from those we've seen applied to Mistral: "Because of her high educational attainments in English, Sanskrit, and Hindi, her poems are mature and

refined….Her language is simple and moving….She evokes appealing and natural images of love …..[and] expresses the pain and agony of a heart filled with love" (qtd. in Schomer 240-41). Karine Schomer writes in her *Mahadevi Varma and the Chhayavad Age of Modern Hindi Poetry* (1983), that it was "by more than coincidence" that the anthology began with Mirabai and ended with Mahadevi Varma. Taking this non-coincidence as a cue, along with the apparent similarities between Mahadevi Varma and Mirabai's poetic content, Varma became the "modern Mira." Indeed, as Schomer notes,by the time, Varma's collection*Rashmi* (A ray of sunlight) came out, the idea of calling Mahadevi Varma the "modern Mira" was so familiar that her poetry had begun to be discussed in terms of devotional elements – of a "virahini," or "a woman separated from her beloved," where the beloved was always the absent god.

This marketing of Varma as the "modern Mira" was furthered by the reviews and literary criticism in Hindi magazines. Just four years after the publication of the anthology, Ramvilas Sharma in 1934, while reviewing Mahadevi's two poetry collection, *Rashmi*, and *Nihar* (Mist) wrote in an article in the Hindi magazine *Sudha*:

> Just as the true bhakta (devotee) wants bhakti more than he does the Lord, and the jarma-yogi (one who follows the way of detached action) abandons all hope for the fruit of his action and desires only the action itself, so [Mahadevi Varma's] virahi ceases worrying about union and remains absorbed in separation. (qtd. and translated by Schomer 241)

The image of a "mystical poetess in waiting" had only strengthened with time. An even more interesting correspondence that occurred in relation to Mahadevi Varma's iconization as the "modern Mira" in Hindi literary and public life was Gandhi's appropriation of medieval poet Mira to represent the Indian nation and the national symbol of purity and devotion. This re-inscription of Mira on the national stage only fueled Mahadevi Varma's appropriation as "modern Mira" in the Hindi literary circle, which had not seen a prominent woman poet in the limelight for a very long time, and was lobbying for making Hindi the national language of India. By the 1930s, Varma had become a woman poet of importance who participated actively in kavi-sammelans (poetry gatherings), received several prizes, and presided over a kavi-sammelan where Gandhi himself was invited. In 1938 she was selected to write the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan's (Hindi Literary Society's) new series on living Hindi poets, *Adhunik Kavi* [The Modern Poet] (Schomer 243-51). The prestige of these awards and honors was in tandem with the mass entrance of women in the national movement, meshing smoothly with Gandhi's appropriation of Mira as a symbol of purity and devotion, and Mahadevi Varma's image as the selfless and pure icon of femininity for Hindi literary society.

Varma and Mira -- their poems

Before we delve into comparativing the poems of Varma and Mira, let us take a brief look at Mira herself. Born in Rajasthan in c. 1498, and betrothed to the prince of Mewar, Mira is often said to be a contemporary of Surdas, a medieval poet., The first

hagiography of Mira was written by Priyadas (1712 CE) in his commentary on Nabhadas' *Bhaktamala*. This account has provided the fodder for developing conjectures on her life. Very early in her life she became a devotee of Krishna or Giridhar, whose references we find in almost all her verses. It is said that when she couldn't perform her wifely duties as a result of her devotion to the god, the rana (it is unknown whether this was her father-in-law or her husband) tried to poison her, though she survived. According to Rupert Snell in his *The Hindi Classical Tradition: A Braj Bhasa Reader* (1991) one doesn't know if Mira's reference to prosecution and poisoning in her verses is metaphorical or real, but she is "regarded as the exemplar of single-minded spiritual dedication, a theme constantly voiced in her padas" [a couplet, a foot, a line, or verse that it intended for devotional singing] (39).

Bear in mind that Mira's verses express her love *only* for Giridhar or Krishna. Further, her padas have been handed down orally. There is not one definite text, several versions existing in Gujarati, Rajasthani, and Braj Bhasha, that have also been, no doubt, interpolated. The major theme of her poems is the outspoken love of someone in separation or virahini (a woman in separation). Let us take a quick look at two of her padas, and compare them with Varma's:

Pada 1:

दरस बिन दुखण लागै नैण
जब के तुम बिछुरे प्रभु मोरे, कबहूँ न पायो चैन
सबद सुणत मेरी छतियाँ काँपै, मीठे मीठे बैन
बिरह कथा कासूँ कहूँ सजनी, बह गई करवत अैन

कल न परत तल हरि मग जोवत, भई छमासी रैण
मीराँ के प्रभु कब रे मिलोगे, दुःख मेटण सुख दैण (*Braj Bhasha Reader* 106).

Without a vision of you my eyes have begun suffering;
since you left, my lord, I have found no comfort.
Hearing his voice my heart trembles at those sweet, sweet words;
to whom can I tell the tale of my lovesickness, it has sliced me with a saw's motion.
I have no rest, watching from the roof for Hari, and the night has become a six-month;
Mira's lord, when will you meet me, to remove sorrow and to bring joy?
(Snell 106-7)

Pada 2:

पग घूँघरु बाँध मीराँ नाची रे
मैं तो मेरे नारायण की आपहि हो गइ दासी रे
लोग कहैं मीराँ भई बावरी, न्यात कहैं कुल नासी रे
विष का प्याला राणाजी भेज्या, पीवत मीराँ हाँसी रे
मीराँ के प्रभु गिरधर नागर सहज मिले अबिनासी रे (*Braj Bhasha Reader* 104)

Mira tied bells to her feet and danced;
I have myself become the slavegirl of my Narayana.
People say Mira has gone mad, kinsmen call her a destroyer of family;
Ranaji sent a poisoned cup, Mira laughed as she drank it.
Mira has readily found her lord, the courtly Giridhar, the eternal one (Tr. Snell 105).

The first pada begins with an explanation of Mira's state of mind and body the moment her lover takes leave. Her eyes, she says, begin suffering, and there is no comfort. Mira finds herself in a unique position of not being able to express her lovesickness. It is only Krishna/Hari/Giridhar who can remove her sorrow and bring joy. The pada ends with Mira ordering *her* beloved to tell her when would be the next

meeting. In the second pada, we witness an actual irreverence toward social rules and matrimony. The mad Mira has tied bells to her feet to literally announce her lack of interest in anyone except Giridhar. The intensity of her love is such that even poison cannot harm her. The pada ends with Mira declaring that she has found the ultimate – *her* Giridhar.

Now Varma:

कौन तुम मेरे हृदय में?

कौन मेरी कसक में नित
मधुरता भरता अलक्षित?
कौन प्यासे लोचनों में
घुमड़ घिर झरता अपरिचित ?

स्वर्णस्वप्नों का चितेरा
नींद के सूने निलय में!
कौन तुम मेरे हृदय में?

अनुसरण नश्वास मेरे
कर रहे किसका निरंतर?
चूमने पदचिन्ह किसके
लौटते यह श्वास फिर फिर!

कौन बंदी कर मुझे अब
बन्ध गया अपनी विजय में
कौन तुम मेरे हृदय में?

एक करुण आभाव में चिर --
तृप्ति का संचार संचित;

एक लघु क्षण दे रहा
निर्वाण के वरदान शत शत,

पा लिया मैंने किसे इस
वेदना के मधुर त्रय में?
कौन तुम मेरे हृदय में?

गूंजता उर में न जाने
दूर के संगीत सा क्या!
आज खो निज का मुझे
खोया मिला, विपरीत क्या!

क्या नहा आई विरह-निशि
मिलन मधु-दिन के उदय में?
कौन तुम मेरे हृदय में?

तिमिर -पारावार में
आलोक-प्रतिमा है अकिम्पत:
आज ज्वाला से बरसता
क्यों मधुर घनसार सुरभित?

सुन रही हूँ एक ही
झकार जीवन में, प्रलय में?
कौन तुम हृदय में?

मूक सुक दुख कर रहे
मेरा नया श्रृंगार सा क्या?
झूम गर्वित स्वर्ग देता --
नत धरा को प्यार सा क्या?

आज पुलकित सृष्टि क्या

करने चली अभिसार लय में?
कौन तुम मेरे हृदय में? (*Meri Priya Kavitain* 44).

Who are you in my heart?

Who are you in my heart?

Who, imperceptible, always
fills my anguish with sweetness?
Who, unknown, overflows
like storm clouds in my thirsty eyes?

Painter of golden dreams
in the empty house of sleep!
Who are you in my heart?

Whom do my breaths eternally pursue?
To kiss whose footprints
does this breath return again and again?
Who, having made me a prisoner,
is now imprisoned in his victory?
Who are you in my heart?

The world of gratification
has long gathered in this sad absence.
A brief moment bestows
eternal bliss countless times.

Whom did I obtain
is this sweet barter of pain?
Who are you in my heart?

Who knows what sounds in my heart
like faraway music?
Today, having lost myself,
I found what I have lost—isn't that the opposite!

Has the night of separation
in the dawn of the sweet meeting-day?
Who are you in my heart?

In the ocean of darkness,
the image of light is unwavering.
Today, why does the sweet, fragrant camphor
rain down in flames?

Am I hearing the same ringing note in life, in dissolution?
Who are you in my heart?

Is silent joy hurting like a new adornment?
Do the swaggering, proud heavens give
Something like love to the bent earth?

Today, has ecstatic creation gone
to unite with the lover even in destruction?
Who are you in my heart?

(Trans. Sarah Houston Green, 27-8).[29]

Unlike Mira's verses where the beloved was an actual physical entity, Varma's poems typically display an uncertainty about the tangible presence and identity of the beloved. The repeated question, "Who are you in my heart?" echoes throughout the poem with no affirmative conclusion. In Mira's verses, however, the separation and union result from the absence and presence of Giridhar. Very differently, Varma's poems delineate the playful separation between the "I" and "You" within the self, in ways that bear comparison to Mistral's "la otra." The "You" or the "other" in Varma thrives and dies within the self, with no historical, social, and sometimes even proper gender reference. While love, separation, joy, irreverence the social norms, pain, and other emotions are staged in front of an audience in Mira's verses, there is no one to witness the poignant pain of construction and deconstruction in Varma's poem. Thus, from the sheer thematic point of view, both poets differ in their very conception of referents that make their

[29] Dissertation.

poems poetic. If Mira's verses are specifically about Giridhar, herself, and the conflict with the society that sees her mad, Varma's poems are compressed in just two words – "I," and "You." And yet instead of being seen together with poets like Mistral, Varma became the "modern Mira."

The loss and gain in translation of the "modern Mira"

The impact of iconizing or perhaps even marketing Mahadevi Varma as the "modern Mira" has been such that there is a clear-cut division in the way her work has been translated and received in English. Owing to her image in the Hindi literary tradition as the "modern Mira," I argue, translators in English have preferred Varma's prose, which has seemed to them to be more genuinely "modern" and relevant to an international audience, since unlike her poetry, it objectively addresses objective cultural and social problems of women, and even the authorial "I" is mostly absent.

In "The Reticent Autobiographer: Mahadevi Varma's Writings," Francesca Orsini has analyzed the split in the use of subjectivity in Varma's poems and prose as a strategy to keep the public and private separate at a particularly conservative time for women in the northern India. Francesca adds further that calling Mahadevi Varma's poems mystical shielded her private self, while allowing her to play with the abstract, sexuality, desire, and even irony. Strategically useful though this separation may have been in its Indian context, however, I believe that it has had a negative impact on the survival of her poems in other languages. Her poetry is neither looked at as expressing desire, feminist ideals, or

sexuality, nor as connected with the nationalistic movement. They remain ahistoric, and at best yield scholarship such as the exhaustive but limited study of Varma's work by Karen Schomer, focused on a development of the self as a poet.

Very differently, translations into English of Varma's socially conscious and feminist work like *Smriti ki Rekhyan* (1943) as *A Pilgrimage to the Himalayas*, (1978), *Atit ke Chalchitra* (1941) as *Sketches from my Past* (1994), and *Srinkhala ki Kariyan* (1942) as *Links in the Chain* (2003) have had a healthy afterlife. Further, one of her essays, "Jeene ki Kala," published in *Srinkhala ki Kariyan* (*Links in the Chain*) has had a further afterlife as "The Art of Living," translated by Chandra Agarwal for *The Penguin New Writing in India*, edited by Aditya Behl and David Nicholls in 1994. The introduction to the anthology tells the reader that the book is "designed to introduce the English-language reader to the extraordinary range of contemporary Indian writing" that "often goes unnoticed in an international marketplace preoccupied with the literary blockbuster" of writers such as Vikram Seth, Bharti Mukherjee and Salman Rushdie (Behl and Nicholls ix). Moreover, the editors inform the readers of this anthology that "Women writers comprise about half the contributions" in the book, "ranging from Mahadevi Varma, whose 1934 essay is considered a classic of Indian feminism, through the 1960s to the present" (x). Ironically, readers are never told which women writers from languages other than Hindi have been included in the anthology. Varma's "The Art of Living" becomes emblematic of Indian feminism for both editors and the newly initiated reader of Indian literatures, either in India or abroad. A more recent work, *Mahadevi*

Varma: Political Essays on Women, Culture, and Nation (2010), edited by Anita Anantharam, who has focused on translating Varma's political writings, though at least including a few poems, and with a sumptuous analytical introduction on Varma's work, both poetry and prose. Though, it is interesting to note the editor prefers to call Varma "Mahadevi" throughout – another parallel with Mistral.

Unlike the afterlives of Varma's modern prose in English, her "modern Mira" image of Hindi poetry hasn't found a proper home in other languages. Although a handful of Varma's translated poems have appeared in two anthologies on chayavaad poetry, *The Return of Sarasvati* (1998), and *Of Love and War: A Chayavad Anthology* (2005), both by David Rubin, only one meager thin book, now out of print, offers selections from her five volumes of poetry in English. Varma is also almost absent, whether in prose or poetry, in other Indian languages, despite writing in the national language, and receiving several national awards for her contribution to Hindi literature. L.S. Sinha's *Selected Poems* is the only book dedicated to translations of Varma's poems from *Nihar* (1930), *Nirja* (1934), *Sandhya Git* (1936), and *Deepshikha* (1942).

Like his predecessors, L.S. Sinha states his purpose of translating Varma's poems in the "Preface" in terms of her mysticl and Mira-like qualities: "Those who have read and appreciated the poetry of Mahadevi Varma have invariably been impressed, even moved, by the beauty of her expression heightened by the tenderness of emotion of love, a unique quality of mysticism and a sense of humanism." He does go a step further by connecting Mahadevi Varma's image of the "modern Mira" with that of Tagore,

remarking that the "one great poet whom" Mahadevi Varma "resembles most, is surely Rabindranath Tagore." Yet, sadly, whereas Tagore, "whose works were originally in Bengali, could reach out to a very large number of readers through his own English translation of *Gitanjali* and other poetic compositions," Mahadevi Varma despite "her great popularity," hardly reached out beyond "the aesthetic sensibilities of non-Hindi speaking people even in her own country." The collection, adds Sinha, a selection of her poems "from *Neehar*, *Rashmi*, *Neerja*, *Sandhya Geet*, and *Deep Shikha*, is an attempt in that direction" (5).

Sinha goes on to say that he has takenevery care to be "as faithful to the original as possible," while retaining the "beauty of expression as could be done without intelligibility." The reader is assured that Mahadevi Varma herself was "very much satisfied with the English renderings of her poems" done by Sinha (5). But despite paying attention to the form and exquisite expressions in Mahadevi Varma's poems, Sinha makes little effort to render the complicated and dramatic play between the poetic "I" and "you" in his English versions, or to reflect on the split in the use of subjectivity in Varma's prose and poems. Later in the "Notes on the Translation," while comparing the ease of translating prose with the difficulty of rendering poetry in another language, Sinha informs the readers that the translator has exercised all the caution to capture the poet's "own feelings, emotional experiences and imagination" (21), yet we hear nothing about the genuinely modern aspects of Varma's use of language and her shifting identity. Furthering the image of "the modern Mira" pining for her absent divine beloved, Sinha

writes that the major problem in translating Varma is the fact that: "An intense devotion to the lord she is in love with, has naturally led her to borrowing images from temple worship, in a number of items associated with it" (22). But associating Varma's poems just with the temple, or with the image of the "modern Mira" in-waiting, does two things: 1) it views Varma's poems anachronistically, severing any ties with the political fervor of her times, and 2) it takes away the chance to look at Varma's poems with the Urdu ghazal tradition. This very distinct poetic strand within Varma's verses, seen in her sophisticated use of such established ghazals motifs such as "the moth and the lamp" and "the nightingale and the rose," complicates Varma's position within Indian literary tradition, revealing her artistry as a modern interfusing of classical traditions rather than the simple outpouring of mystical fervor. In place of any such analysis, Sinha "a certain uniqueness" in Varma's poetry which finally offers little more than centuries-old tropes:

> Her poetry is marked by a depth of emotion born out of an intense and abiding love for her lord. Some people regard the person she is in love with as the divine being, the ultimate reality with which the individual soul is constantly eager to unite. Others are not inclined to lend credence to thus theory and would not go beyond characterizing this love as the ordinary eroticism of day-to-day life. . . . But as we read poems after poems of Mahadevi, it is difficult to accept this simplistic analysis. What appears nearer reality is the fact that she has lifted human love to a high degree of divine love where the lover or the devotee can see

nothing but her beloved or lord who manifests himself in everything observable. (L.S. Sinha 16)

Unhesitatingly, Sinha informs readers that Varma's poems are divine love poems, where the devotee only sees the beloved in everything visible under the sun. Varma hrself would hardly have been surprised by this treatment. As she had herself written,

> When a woman enters the literary field. . . she is greeted with astonishment and disbelief. . . .Women writers are misunderstood and held in disrepute by the male literary community. . . . If a woman writes a story about a woman's unhappy experience, it is taken to be autobiographical, and attempts are made to use it against her. . . .If she writes a poem abour love, hundreds of love poems come raining down on her in reply. . . .If she speaks out against these things, all manner of cruel and indecent charges are made against her. . . . A woman in literature is to men primarily a source of humor or entertainment" (qtd. in Orsini 55).

In the above quoted paragraph, Varma's frustration is evident. Women authors, according to her, can only be read in certain ways by the dominant male literary community.

Let's take a quick look at one of Sinha's translations, followed my translation of the same poem, to analyze the myth of "modern Mira" :

जो तुम आ जाते एक बार

कितनी करूणा कितने संदेश
पथ में बिछ जाते बन पराग;
गाता प्राणों का तार तार
अनुराग भरा उन्माद राग;

आँसू लेते वे पथ पखार|

हंस उठते पल में आर्द्र नयन
धुल जाता होठों से विषाद,
छा जाता जीवन में बसंत
लुट जाता चिर संचित विराग;

आँखें देतीं सर्वस्व वार| (*Meri Priya Kavitain* 8).

L.S Sinha:

If you could come once

If you had come to me only once!

Your path would have been strewn with
flowers of enormous compassion and innumerable messages,
every string of my heart would have
resounded with joy-filled music;

my tears would have washed your feet.

The moist eyes would have been filled with a smile
and grief would have been washed off my lips,
this life would have been filled with spring,
the long nursed renunciation would have vanished,

these eyes would have given you everything (28).

My translation:

"If you could come once"

So much compassion, so many messages
would have covered the path like flowers' pollen;
every bit of the self would have sung
a happiness filled ecstatic raga

Tears would have washed those feet on the path

In a moment wet sad eyes would have smiled.
Bitterness would have been washed away from the lips
spring would have embraced life
aloofness would have been robbed from the heart

These eyes would have given you everything.

Unlike the original, Sinha's version inserts a variant of the title of the poem as the first line. In the original the title acts as an important line, setting up an expectation of a fictional scenario for the entire poem, in which a series of events could have happened if the visitor or the "you" had arrived. There is no indication in the original that the "you" is a divine entity. Further, Sinha inserts deictic, first and second person pronouns in the poem, understandably wishing to clarify the subject-object relation in the English sentences – when they are absent in the original. But the very absence of pronouns in this poem gives it mystic overtones, clearly present in "flower-strewn paths," and the self moved to ecstasy. Thus, the poem seems on the whole to make quite logical a reading of Varma as solidly within the bhakti tradition, or the larger Persian/Urdu ghazals tradition, up through Ghalib and beyond, where it's often deliberately ambiguous whether the absent lover is human or divine, but is surely not close to Mira's padas. Further, the original is powerful because it describes events that could have happened if the "you" of the poem, who is *only* addressed in the title, not even in the body of the poem, had come. The poetic self or the subjective "I" is completely absent in the original, emphasizing the dream-like scenario around an invisible self, perhaps observed by an on-looker, very much different from Mira's verses.

Although at a cursory look the play between the poetic constructs "you" and "I" may seem simply to refer allegorically to a divine lover (Krisha), Varma uses language and the poetic scenario to complicate these notions. In fact, through her poems she subtly subverts culturally accepted notion of a female subject in waiting by seldom revealing the gendered identity of the poetic "I" and "you." On a superficial level, however, since the poems were composed by a woman, they give an impression of a woman in waiting. But Varma is able to twist the meanings of culturally familiar metaphors by redirecting the reader in understanding the relationship of the "I" with the "you" in the poem. The following poem from *Nirja* (1924), which thankfully has two afterlives, will prove my point. I will first give the original, then the two translations, and finally my version and critique.

Original in Hindi:

"टूट गया वह दर्पण"

टूट गया वह दर्पण निर्मम!
उसमें हँस दी मेरी छाया!
मुझमें रो दी ममता माया,
अश्रु -हास ने विश्व सजाया,
रहे खेलते आंखमिचौनी
प्रिय ! जिसके परदे में 'मैं '-'तुम'!
टूट गया वह दर्पण निर्मम!

अपने दो आकार बनाने;
दोनों का अभिसार दिखाने,
भूलों का संसार बसाने,

जो झिलमिल झिलमिल सा तुमने
हँस हँस दे डाला था निरुपम !
टूट गया वह दर्पण निर्मम!

कैसा पतझर कैसा सावन,
कैसी मिलन विरह की उलझन,
कैसा पल घड़ियोंमय जीवन,
कैसे निशि-दिन कैसे सुख-दुःख
आज विश्व में तुम हो या तम !
टूट गया वह दर्पण निर्मम!

किसमें देख सँवारूं कुंतल,
अंगराग पुलकों का मल मल,
स्वप्नों से आँजूँ पलकें चल,
किस पर रीझूँ किस से रूठूँ,
भर लूँ किस छवि से अन्तरतम!
टूट गया वह दर्पण निर्मम!

आज कहाँ मेरा अपनापन;
तेरे छिपने का अवगुण्ठन;
मेरा बंधन तेरा साधन,
तुम मुझ में अपना सुख देखो
मैं तुम में अपना दुःख प्रियतम!
टूट गया वह दर्पण निर्मम! (*Meri Priya Kavitain* 55).

LS. Sinha:

That mirror is broken

That heartless mirror is broken!

In it my reflection mocked at me,

the bonds of attachment caused tears in me
tears and laughter lent color to this world,

behind whose curtain, dear, you and I
played hide and seek.

That heartless mirror is broken!

To make two images of ours,
to reflect our love-play therein,
to fill it with the wrongs we had done

that shimmering matchless mirror
you had given me, is broken!

I did not care for the autumn, nor the wet rainy season,
union and separation ceased to bother me,
the transitoriness of life also lost its meaning,

the night and day, joy and sorrows were the same
to me,
today in this world there in darkness without you.

That heartless mirror is broken!

How to do my hair now,
how to apply unguent to my body.
how to bedeck my eyes with collyrium,

with whom should I feel pleased and with whom
annoyed,
which image should I seek within my bosom?

That heartless mirror is broken!

No longer do I feel conscious of my existence,
which was a curtain that concealed you;
my bondage is your desire,

you may look for your joy in me
and I shall seek my sorrow in you, my beloved.

That heartless mirror is broken! (54-55).

David Rubin:

"That cruel mirror is broken!"

That cruel mirror is broken!
In it my shadow laughed,
in me illusion and desire were weeping,
tears and laughter adorned the world –
lover, we were playing
blindman's bluff in the delusion of 'I' and 'you'.

Creating two forms of self,
portrayed as two lovers' meeting,
inhabiting a world of errors –
incomparable, laughing,
you made it up to dazzle me.

What then is autumn, what then the rains,
what this complexity of meeting and parting,
this sorry life of minutes and hours,
of night and day, of joy and sorrow,
or in this world today either you or I?

In what mirror shall I look to adorn my hair,
How in a rapture anoint my body
or darken my restless eyes with dreams,
who shall thrill me, who drive me to fury
with what image fill my soul?

Where now is my identity
in what are you concealed,
where my subjection or your victory?
Find your happiness in me,
my lover, and I in you my sorrow! (96-7)

The translator tells us that he followed the reprint of this poem in *Adhunik Kavi* (1965), which omits the repetition of the opening line after each stanza.

My translation:

That mirror broke

That cold mirror is broken!

In it my reflection laughed!
Inside me cried affection and illusion,
tears and laughter adorned the world,

played hide and seek,
beloved! behind that curtain 'I' 'You' !
That cold mirror is broken!

To draw two outlines of us,
to show union between the two,
to make a home of mistakes,

that sparkling matchless form,
you had laughingly given !
That cold mirror is broken!

What autumn what monsoon,
what anxiety on meeting-parting,
what ephemeral life of moments,

what day-night what happiness-pain
today in the world it's you or darkness!
That cold mirror is broken!

Where shall I look to adorn my hair,
to anoint fragrance on my ecstatic body,
or wear the kohl of dreams on my eyelids

with whom will I be thrilled, with whom will I be angry
with which reflection shall I fill the darkness within!
That cold mirror is broken!

Today where is my familiar self;
the place where you hid yourself;
my attachments were your ways,

You look for happiness in me
I look for pain in you, beloved!

That cold mirror is broken!

The poem has a recurrent theme of the poetic self engaged in an internal dialogue. Except for the reference toward the end of the poem to adorning hair and eyes, all the stanzas remain mysteriously opaque about the gendered identity of the poetic speaker. But it is safe to assume in this poem that the speaker is a woman, looking in the "cold" mirror, musing over her reflection, and pondering the imaginary constructs "I" and "you" that just broke with the mirror. Indeed, the poem gives a subtle play of subjectivities, complicated by a reflection in the mirror.

David Rubin, while commenting and comparing the uninhibited subjectivity of chayavad poets in the "Introduction" to his anthology *Of Love and War* (2005), says that the "I" had previously been of very little importance to Hindi literature, which was so strongly "devotional in the medieval period and later concerned, above all, with technical bravura in the succeeding era know as ritikal (1650-1850)" (xiii). The poets of theses two schools (medieval and ritikal) remained anonymous, "expressing their individuality only in the success or failure of their seemingly endless treatment of familiar subjects," such as Radha-Krsiina trysts, or the description of a beautiful woman. In chayavaad however, even if the poet used the traditionally accepted tropes, they referred back to the poetic "I" in the poem. Further, he adds that of all the four major chayavaad poets, Mahadevi Varma is the only one who did not use natural or historical events in her poems.

Curiously, while translating Mahadevi Varma in his *Of Love and War* David Rubin prefaces Mahadevi Varma's above poem "Toot gaya woo darpan nirmam" ("That cruel mirror is broken!) as follows:

> The following poem is an allegory of the realization of the individual's identity with Brahman, the One, the real of the real. Breaking the mirror of Maya frees the poet, allowing her to see that all the dualities of earthly life are illusory – the individual and Brahman, human and divine, lover and beloved, worshipper and worshipped. The terms of the allegory and the immateriality of the physical universe are spelled out more specifically than is usually the case with Mahadevi (96)

Although it could be argued that the poem becomes an allegory for the realization of the poetic speaker's identity with the Brahman, the poem is in tune with the ghazal tradition. The poetic speaker is exiled from her beloved, and is suffering, though we do not know the situation that led to that exile – or separation. We are also not aware if the separation is voluntary. Further, there are no indications that would help us in locating the "you" of the poem. It could very well be a reflection, or dialogue with the self. In fact, the absent lover is ironically present in the speaker's body, whose identity is conflated with the speaker's. But strangely, there are no referents that indicate that the beloved is male – or even a separate entity at all. It is quite possible that the beloved is nothing but a part of the poetic modernist self, musing over the death of an old self.

The next to last stanza of the poem confirms this, as it indicates that the poetic self perhaps has been separated or alienated from the "familiar self." The line "mera bandhan tera saadhan," (my bondage is your way) literally undermines the importance of "you," shown through the semi-formal "tum" in the poem to the extremely informal yet endearing word "tera" (tú in Spanish). And the dramatic final line in the poem that somehow sums up the gist of the poem confirms that the split between "I" and "you" is vast because the poetic "you" looks for happiness in the "self," but the poetic "I" looks for pain. The beloved and the lover are present and inseparable, and their division is unclear.

Clearly, the "lover" in Mahadevi Varma's poem is not the traditional woman in separation from her beloved, as the boundaries between the two are unclear. It is perhaps the modernist split self right at the brink of chaos amid the upheavals of Varma's times. Her poems can thus be read as a dialogue within the corporeal self. And it is quite possible that the "you" in the poem is nothing but a feminine self, reflected in the mirror that needs to die, rather like Mistral's "La otra." In her essay "Adhunik Kavi" (The Modern Poet), Varma describes the poet's work as that of the individual self that is deeply intertwined with the society as whole (*Mahadevi Varma: Political Essays* 97). Further, in "The Links in Our Chain" Varma says that in the modern society women have not been able to develop an "individual, appropriate, and rational personality." But when they do develop they are frowned upon, and are disrespected (*Mahadevi Varma: Political Essays* 76). As in Mistral's poem, which had begun with the self-murder and the

distinction between the poetic "I" and "la otra," the "you" and "I" reflected in Mahadevi Varma's poem encourage a semantic and cultural distinction that must end in the demise of the singular subject.

Recognizing the importance of deictics in Varma's poems, and criticizing her clichéd image of "modern Mira" in literary discourses, the Hindi critic Doodhnaath Singh raises an important question in his book *Mahadevi* (2009), ironically named after Varma's first name: "But who are the "you" and "I" in Varma's poems, and where could they be located? They are unlimited. Should we see Mahadevi in them – only Mahadevi – or a poetic world embedded in these pronouns constructed by Mahadevi via pronouns as a reflection of all the women in the world?" (my translation 60). Unlike his predecessors, Doodhnath Singh calls the pronouns and Varma's poetic construct "secular" and "modern," rather than relating them to religious myths. Such a perspective is a rare departure from approaches like that of Karine Schomer, who looks at Varma's poetic collection as "transformative," helping the writer in untangling philosophical questions via art, where the journey towards self-discovery becomes a tool for understanding the personal, and its connection with the universal. Acknowledging the difficulty in understanding and translating Varma's poem, Rubin makes a prophetic conclusion toward the end of his introduction to Varma. He says, "Mahadevi is probably not a poet who will ever gain popularity," as she "demands of her readers both great patience and a near-ecstatic absorption" (159). Looking at her staggering translational history of poems in English, it is difficult to disagree with Rubin, though one wonders if it is a demand for

patience or "near-ecstatic absorption" or something else imposed by the translator/critic that has stilted Varma's afterlife in translation – and not just in English but in other languages as well.

Conclusion

In his "Comparing Poetry," Jonathan Culler suggests that "in comparing or theorizing about poetry, it is important to think about other traditions than one's own, however inadequate one's linguistic capacities" (xv). But reading poetry in translation brings an added burden. Unlike novels or foreign movies with subtitles, by virtue of its density of literary conventions poetry is untranstalable. Yet, as we have seen, the poetic works of Gabriela Mistral and Mahadevi Varma carry behind them a bundle of political, ideological, and cultural discourse in their (un)translatabilities. We might be twice removed from the original language of the two poets in the translated versions, as many critics could say, yet we have now read them together, for the first time. We see that their translators have left enough evidence for us to admonish or appreciate their tasks. Certainly just being away from the language should not blind us to the events that make the poems more poetic, whether on the page or in socio-historical terms. Further, we can experience some pleasure and also some productive pain in reading multiple versions of a single poem in just one language (in this case English). The fact that a single poem can evoke multiple interpretations within a few lines highlights the very open-endedness of

the task. This is not to say that all translations are right, but most translations have a right to exist, as their mere existence leaves a trace and history to sample and test.

For Culler, teaching poems from different traditions is the only way to bring the study of languages back to the center, as they initiate readers into a different relation to language, "where it is not something supposedly transparent but manifestly opaque and haunting," and the "puzzling mode of address to the reader" encapsulated in a poem presents "the possibility of possession by language, fascination with it, as something to explore, to live with and live in." Culler ends his essay by saying that the "possibility of savoring language may even be increased by the opacity of the still foreign tongue that prevents it from functioning to communicate except insofar as we take the time to compare language with language, poem with poem, exploring poetic resources and modes of intensification, in a labor of comparative literature" (xvii). Indeed, in the sweet labor of comparative literature, comparing language with language, and poem with poem is our task. However, the trick is to not *just* compare poems and languages in the *original*, but be open to comparing and analyzing the registers of translatabilities from different traditions and languages that apparently would never be read together.

In "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin says that the task of translation is to establish "the central reciprocal relationship between languages" (72), even if they fail to be translatable. But as I have shown by juxtaposing Mistral and Varma's (un)translatabilities, the task of a comparatist in the present age of globalization is also not very different. For Benjamin languages are not strangers to one another, and

translation becomes the ultimate tool for demonstrating this kinship and establishing "translatability." As global and local comparative readers, our task is to critically read, compare, and connect the registers of translatability within and across languages. The more distant the languages and poetic traditions to be compared, the better can be the outcome.

If we think of translatability in terms of a relational concept, a worldly act, and perhaps even a maneuvered performance, as explored in this chapter, we can welcome the entry of poetry in translation in the era of the new comparative literature, something as expansive as the multiple versions of Tagore's *Gitanjali*. Unlike Tagore who created his own translatability via self-translation, "Gabriela" and "the modern Mira" are not purely self-made. A comparative poetics with an emphasis on (un)translatability will restage the importance of the poem, both in the "original" and "translation," by addressing the registers of translatability. New avenues of poetic comparison and cultural analysis open up when we juxtapose less-translated poets with often-translated ones in languages other than English, giving us new ways to realize Tagore's dream of a dynamic "vishwa sahitya."

Chapter 4 Comparative Modernism: Joyce, Rao, Desani, and Borges[30]

"I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't You see?" (Kamala Das 10).

In *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Márquez*, Franco Moretti calls modernist novels like *Ulysses* or *Midnight's Children* "world texts" that are monumental but "semi-failed" and virtually unreadable books, but ones which the scholarly community has successfully managed to create an obligation to study in the literary system. For him, this obligation to read these virtually "unreadable texts" or "world texts" is a strategy to compensate for what these texts are lacking – self-sufficiency (5). I argue in this chapter that what makes these world texts unreadable or insufficient as a whole is their inherent (un)translatability that renders these texts sufficiently at home abroad but also sufficiently alien to have a real impact in a foreign system (Moretti 233). This dual functionality, when taken as a mode of reading can help us to move beyond the circuits of postcolonial geography, thereby resisting what Emily Apter has called a "transnationally translatable monoculture" in her *The Translation Zone*, and helping us in arriving at a new comparability of comparative literature.

[30] Parts of this chapter were published. Here are the details: Tiwari, Bhavya. "World Literature and the Case of Joyce, Borges, and Rao." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture.* 14.2 (June 2012).

In order to elaborate and concretize my argument, I have taken the case of James Joyce: a global figure, hovering between modernist and post-modernist aesthetics, an intriguing colonial/postcolonial writer, polyglot, an avid supporter of translation, but a writer whose own work presents a challenge to translation as a practice and theory. Yet Joyce's work has had a major role in establishing connections in local and global frameworks. Thus, this chapter takes up Joyce and Joycean aesthetics to create literary dialogue between South Asia and Latin America by exploring the relevance of Joyce's (un)translatability for modernist and postcolonial writers from the global south. My intentions in this chapter are not to show some sort of universal literary paradigm originating in Europe and diffusing in the periphery. For me, Joyce is as much from the periphery as someone like Raja Rao, G.V. Desani, or Borges, and reading the (un)translatabilities of such authors reveals a network of related yet localized aesthetics in and across literary systems.

A close analysis of Joyce's reception and translation can expose the role that literary works, especially novels, play in the production and reproduction of discourse of globalization with a cultural difference. Further, texts from India such as Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) and G. V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), which stretch and invent language, contrast sharply with Borges' dislike for word-play and neologism, though they harmonize in turn with the boom and post-boom authors like Miguel Angel Asturias, Julio Cortázar, Juan Rulfo, Guillermo Cabrera Infante or José María Arguedas, all of whom were greatly impressed with James Joyce. This complex web of connection

and dissociation provides a rice comparative source for studying different kinds of (un)translatability in the global south.

(Un)translatability as a mode of reading

In her essay "Imagining World Literatures: Modernism and Comparative Literature," Jessica Berman argues for developing a comparative modernist study that would focus on "a mode of reading" rather than a "canon-building activity" concerned with the problems of modernity and the texts it generates in multiple locations and timeframes. According to her such a comparative approach would stress the negotiations between close and distant reading and acknowledge the importance of language and style, while accepting the inevitability of distance no matter how familiar the context might be. Such a study, she argues, would "begin with the assumption that locatedness and cosmopolitanism are not mutually exclusive, either in writing or in reading, and that modernist texts might group themselves in overlapping connections of interconnectedness" that need not depend on national boundaries (65). Taking Berman's thoughts as my departure point, I argue in this chapter that a comparative global modernist study can go beyond common linguistic contact zones by relying on the concept of (un)translatability that forms the essence of the modernist literary ethos and experience, as evident in literary innovations or what Ezra Pound correctly termed "making it new."

Further in her essay, while explaining the utilitarian reasons for the ubiquitous presence of modernist texts in the ongoing discourses on global comparative literature, Berman says that modernist texts invariably remind us that linguistic meaning is intertextual, language always encounters with what cannot be said, and translation engages with the foreignness of language. These modernist perceptions, she argues, are at the center of the new global comparative literature. For her, translation thus becomes an apt metaphor for literary hermeneutic and modernist study in the global world (65-6). Indeed, modernists texts like *Ulysses* and *All About H. Hatter* are inclined toward a kind of translation that has very little to do with the transference *between* the "source language" and "target language," but with an untranslatability and defamiliarization within one language, which they subvert by creating multiple cultural and stylistic disturbances.

Unlike my previous chapters where I focused on the registers of (un)translatability in poetry, the present chapter takes up novels to further its development in terms of aesthetic defamiliarization and cultural foreignization within a language. There are three reasons for using modernist novels in developing untranslatability. First, the novel – a heteroglossic genre – forms an integral part of the nation-building process, as shown by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities*. Hence, seeing them from a worldly perspective broadens the notion of language and translation in local and global frameworks. Second, as Mariano Siskind points out in his essay "The Globalization of the Novel and the Novelization of the Globe" (2010),

strategic tools such as circulation, reception, and translation of novels worked hand in hand with the colonial enterprise and postcolonial period, thereby making the modern novel an apt global generic phenomenon while producing novel unifying images of the globe in the twentieth century. Like Franco Moretti, Siskind also argues that novels such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* have now come to represent the entire continent in pedagogical world literary practices. Thus, it becomes important to unravel processes and pedagogical tools that could reveal cultural and linguistic differences while keeping in stride with the new global comparative literature. Third, discussing the concept of (un)translatability in modern novels provides us with the chance to expand the literary canon beyond the favored few constantly discussed writers, important for fleshing out the new "comparability" of comparative literature in the age of globalization.

The (un)translatable James Joyce

In his article "Seven Against Ulysses: Joyce in Translation" (1970), Fritz Senn compares seven translations of *Ulysses* in various European languages while listing the multiple difficulties translators have encountered, only to conclude that "it may well be held that just because translation of *Ulysses* is, in a way, impossible it is so eminently worth doing" (534). In "The Backdrop of Translating *Ulysses*" Francisco García Tortosa describes his experiences of translating *Ulysses* into Catalan and says that in the process he discovered his own condition as a linguistic and cultural exile. He begins the article by saying that translating James Joyce is not "a task that one takes on out of boredom or

because one has nothing better at hand to do with one's time. Neither is it a task that lets one lighten a load of frustrations, or gather enduring hopes" (27). García Tortosa adds that even if one did translate *Ulysses* successfully there would be several other translators who would have rendered a word better than the others. Further, even if all this torture was not enough, laments García Tortosa, by the time "we reach the final *Yes* of the novel, having endured the *tour de force* of six hundred pages," a precarious publishing and printing situation awaits the fate of the translator.

If Garcá Tortosa discovered his own linguistic exile while translating Joyce into Catalan, multilingual Indian author Mulk Raj Anand said that he recognized himself in Stephen Dedalus, and considered *Portrait* and *Ulysses* as good models for writing English-language novels of his own. Defining translation, transcreation, and translatability with regards to James Joyce's work is tricky. If one were to consider André Lefevere's thoughts on all translations as rewritings of the "original," many novels from the global south would be called a rewriting or translation of *Ulysses*. Yet, just as a perplexed Moretti wonders toward the end of his book *Modern Epic*, "Does this mean García Márquez's novel really belongs, like it or not, to the western tradition?" (233), only to undercut it in the very next sentence, by saying, "Not exactly," one of my aims in this chapter is to show that *Ulysses* itself is not "western," and that other Ulyssean novels from the global south have a distinct flavor, local and global from the outset.

Surveying French and German translations of *Ulysses* in 1977, Max Halperen in his "'He Became His Admireres': Joyce Abroad" made a bold statement at a time when Joycean study was restricted to a handful of countries:

> In a very real sense, James Joyce's *Ulysses* is still being written, for the novel acquires a new shape with every new translation, and each new version creates its own special vortex of interest and influence. As a world book, then, *Ulysses* casts not one, but many shadows as it proceeds from Mexico to Egypt, from Egypt to Japan; though it is regularly dubbed untranslatable, it is just as regularly translated and retranslated (65).

Halperen raises an important point – *Ulysses* is still being written. As a writerly text it is hard to say where *Ulysses* as a rhizomatic world-text begins and ends, in the translation or in the original. Its (un)translatability is created, translated, and rewritten all over the world – with a difference, so much so that the text itself becomes a point of reference rather than a point of origin. Despite Halperen's declaration that *Ulysses* is being translated around the globe, translations of Joyce's work are absent in South Asia, unlike in South America. And yet writers like Rushdie and Desani have been labeled Joycean.

Translatability, then, as I take it in this chapter, can focus on the source or target texts, but it could also very well be a translation of literary culture, the aesthetics of certain texts, or the translation of an entire world of a literary tradition. Recall how the deictics in Mistral and Varma's poems become cultural referents for their translators and critics. And Tagore's Bengali *Gitanjali*'s self-translation becomes a text to connect and

disconnect in the local and global poetics. Here, I argue that certain texts exhibiting a particular (un)translatability become semantic and literary referents and thus translatables. It is what is "intended" in these texts rather than a pure linguistic transference of signifier and signified from the "original" into the "target." Translatability has very little to with fidelity, as we saw in the multiple registers of translation in Chapter 2, and in Chapter 1 with Tagore's disappointments with the translatability he created in his nonetheless highly successful English *Gitanjali*. It is akin to the potentiality which translation as a mode can realize in another system. Indeed, here it would be apt to explore different kinds of effects that James Joyce's texts such as *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* have set in motion, (re)writing a new "(un)translatability" in South Asian and Latin American texts, but with a difference.

Joyce and Joycean technique in India

There is an amusing scene in Vikram Seth's novel *A Suitable Boy* (1993), where James Joyce becomes an inspiration of "a sudden murderous impulse" for a young university professor who is seized with an incomprehensible desire to kill his senior colleagues for not including Joyce in the curriculum. Dr. Pran, who as a young student had risked his PhD orals and his career at Allahabad University by devoting his time to reading *Ulysses,* stands alone against his senior colleagues to support the inclusion of Joyce in the course called "Modern British literature." The head of the department, Dr. Mishra, who might remind many readers of Mr. Deasy in the "Nestor" chapter of

Ulysses, thinks that *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* (1939) are "unreadable." To him, that kind of writing "is unhealthy for our students. It encourages them, as it were, in sloppy and ungrammatical writing." And what about the ending of *Ulysses*, he thinks aloud, "There are young and impressionable women in our courses" and it "is our responsibility to introduce" them "to the higher things in life" (Seth 56-7). Dr. Mishra dismisses his young colleague's recommendation and thinks that Dr. Pran has imported his ideas about Joyce from Anglo-American scholarship, and thus reminds him reproachfully that India is an independent country, and that he should be careful of blindly following the "American dissertation mill" (56). He goes on to argue that the faculty is already hard-pressed for teaching twenty-one writers in the time allotted to the course, and if "Joyce goes in what comes out?" "Flecker," bursts out Dr. Pran, to which the head of the department laughs indulgently and says: "Pass not beneath, O Caravan, or pass not singing, / Have you heard / That silence where the birds are dead yet sometimes pipeth like a bird?" (57). It is at this moment that Dr. Pran remembers that his department head has two more years before he retires. The narrator tells us that a sudden murderous impulse seizes Pran as "he realized that his hands were trembling slightly. And all this over Joyce, he said to himself" (59).

This humorous episode could be taken as an instance from any faculty meeting in the world where debates on the inclusion and exclusion of writers in the syllabi take on a mock epic stature. But more than that, the episode showcases objections to the reading of Joyce in an Indian university in the 1950s, based on his profanity, linguistic subversion

that leads to an aversion, and concerns of a fixed modernist canon. Notice that these objections come three years after India's independence from the British Raj. Clearly, for many members in that committee, Joyce was then not a postcolonial, marginal, and subaltern figure who experimented with the English language to establish a new (un)translatability in local and global spheres. In fact, he comes out as a dangerous writer who can corrupt India's second official language, English, and the innocent minds of young Indians, especially women. Moreover, the episode also highlights the fact that the senior faculty members of the Department of English at the university in the novel are oblivious to Indian English writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, or G.V. Desani, who in the 1930s and 1940s had published their major work, subverting the use of the English language, literary genres, and Indian nationalism. Both Anand and Desani openly accepted the impact that Joyce's linguistic innovations had on them. It is only a decade or so later that Joyce becomes the touchstone for many scholars of English-language literature and a staple entity in English departments at Indian universities. This change was probably due to the growing studies on Joyce as a colonial subject, and the interest that commonwealth literature had stirred in the international market.

Still, unlike Eliot and Yeats, who were being translated into Indian languages and had become the muse of at least 600 dissertations and publications by 1988, Joyce's presence, translation, reception, and contact with India has remained intangible (see Sen 207). Unlike Mistral and Varma's translatabilities, evident in their translational history and reception in English and Spanish, Joyce's (un)translatability is absent in most Indian

languages in the conventional sense of translating the content of one text into another language, though one can find a rich tradition of translating Joyce in Spanish. Hence, it is not surprising that Dr. Pran, a newly-hired Indian professor, after the episode on Joyce wonders why Eliot is such "a sacred cow for us Indian intellectuals?" (61).

Although many important essays by Eliot and poems by Yeats, were being translated in India, the works of their contemporary Joyce remained (even in the original) outside the intellectual discourse for a long time. Much of this, perhaps, has to do with Eliot's engagement with Sanskrit, and Yeats' close connection with Rabindranath Tagore. The situation has changed since then. With Salman Rushdie's acceptance of Joycean aesthetics as a primary inspiration for his work, and with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* being taught in the departments of English in India, it would be a sign of a lack of university education to dismiss Joyce the way the chair of the Department of English did in Seth's novel. In fact, Rushdie satirizes this new-found respect for Joyce amongst South Asian academicians in his *The Satanic Verses* (1988), when a protagonist tries to impress by saying that she has read *Finnegans Wake* and is therefore well versed in sophisticated Western postmodern discourse (261).

Joyce's interest in Indian philosophy and religions

But even if Joyce's relationship with Indiahas been intangible at first in terms of linguistic experimentation, Joycean aesthetics in India and fragments of Eastern philosophy in his own work beg a fresh approach to this subject. The connection between

India and Joyce is difficult to dismiss after looking at the Buddhist and Upanishadic philosophy one can find in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Further, as essays such as "Home Rule Comes of Age" demonstrate, Joyce was well aware of the political similarities between Ireland and India as England's colonies (Sen 208). To showcase Joyce's knowledge of India, its religious and mythical complexity, Suzette Henke discusses J.S. Atherton's speculation in his *Books at the Wake* that Joyce's knowledge of Hindu mythology came from Helene Petrovna Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, her *Mahatma Letters*, and a German text by Heinrich Zimmer entitled *Maya, der Indische Mythos* (see Sen 208). As pointed out by Krishna Sen, the factual and philosophical haziness of "Madam Blavatsky and the carefully cultivated Orientalist mystique of Zimmer are only too apparent in Stephen's and Bloom's figuration of India in *Ulysses*" (208).

Although many scholars and critics think that Joyce employed Eastern philosophies the most in his *Wake*, one can find a substantial undercurrent of Indian philosophy in *Ulysses* too. The discourse on metempsychosis that Bloom delivers to Molly brings to mind the ancient Hindu and Buddhist theory on rebirth and avatar of the soul. Metempsychosis is an important concept in *Ulysses* especially because the novel records not only personal deaths, but also a national death in the figure of Parnell. Additionally, the dead, the living, and the semi-dead are present in the minds of Bloom and Stephen all the time. In fact, they all come alive in the "Circe" chapter, which belies not only the conventional narrative and generic techniques of a novel, but challenges the concept of time. Further, the numerous references to Hindu gods and goddesses and

Bloom's active imagination—which deludes him into thinking that he is "somewhere in the East" while walking on the streets of Dublin—makes Joyce's text a microcosm of Indian philosophy.

However, despite using Eastern philosophies liberally, Joyce was satirical of the commercial exploitation of Orientalist fantasy in the British press, as evident in his review of Aquila Kempster's *The Adventures of Prince Aga Mirza* in Dublin's *Daily Express* (see Sen 209). Stanislaus Joyce wrote in *My Brother's Keeper* (1958) that Joyce's serious interest in theosophy, a vogue at that time in Dublin, quickly faded away, as he was not the "kind of man to find his heart's ease amidst murmurations of mystics" (132-3). But in an answer to his brother's question as to why he was pottering around with the mystics, Joyce had said that they write about their experiences with a subtlety that cannot be found in "so-called psychological novels" (132). One could argue that for Joyce Eastern philosophies became a literary tool to replace the locus that once belonged to the Catholic religion or any hegemonic ideology. More than a replacement, however, Joyce's use and burlesque of Catholic and Eastern religions is a reflection of the plague that many modern artists carried in their work: the death of god. And, in this godless world, only the artist could become the creator, the destroyer of myths and beliefs, and only he/she through his/her art could provide metempsychosis to salvage humanity.

Unfortunately, the godless world of Joyce does not have a tangible presence in India – at least in the translational history of his work. One would, however, think that the close link formed between India and Ireland in the early nineteenth century with

respect to Home Rule or Annie Besant's connections with the Theosophical Society (see Sen 208) would make Joyce a success in India. This is not the case, and Joyce's direct presence via translation has remained spectral in the literatures of India. For instance, Joyce's *Dubliners* is easily the most translated work of Joyce in the world. A rich tradition of translating *Dubliners* exists in Spanish, and yet so far only two stories from it have been translated in a Bengali literary magazine, *Desa*, in 1946 and 1948 (see Sen 216). Although a small piece on the narrative technique of Joyce's *Ulysses* was also published in a leading Hindi literary journal, *Aajkal*, in 1964, it does not touch upon the influence of *Ulysses* in Hindi literature. Further, as recently as 2005 the first complete work of Joyce, *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, was translated into Malayalam, one of the major Dravidian languages of India (Joyce, *Yuvāvenna*). No attempts to translate *Ulysses*, *Dubliners*, and *Finnegans Wake* have been made.

It is intriguing that Joyce has been such a refracted and marginal figure in Indian languages, even after becoming the golden muse for so many Indian authors writing in English. It is possible that Joyce's use of parodic tone and Catholicism made him unreceptive for translations in India. Also, unlike Latin America, where English remains a foreign language, thereby necessitating the need to translate US-American, Canadian, Australian, and British authors into Spanish, Indians have adopted English as their own. The Sahitya Akademy of India recognizes Indian English as one of the many languages of India. Yet there has been little impetus to translate Joyce for the many readers who would not be comfortable reading complex novels in English. Even so, I argue in this

chapter that Joyce *has been* translated, not in the conventional sense, even before he became popular in university circles in India. His apparent untranslatability has triggered a different kind of aesthetical and literary translatability in South Asian literary traditions that goes beyond treating Joyce as a literary icon, but instead as an aesthetic style.

Translating stream of consciousness in "non-English" Indian writings

It is difficult to imagine that Joyce was not read by Indian authors writing in languages other than English, especially considering the fact that most authors are well versed in canonical British and even Continental European literatures. Krishna Sen has noticed a marked difference between India's "vernacular" literatures and Indian writing in English with respect to Joycean aesthetics and techniques: whereas writers in English adopt and adapt Joycean stylistic experimentation, non-Anglophone writers are much more likely to respond to Joyce on other levels. The early part of the second half of the twentieth century prompted Indian authors to create protagonists who felt alien to the world around them. This motif of the alienated individual helped writers in foregrounding the psychological analysis of characters through the technique of interior monologue (Sen 216). Sen argues that the motivating impulse for creating interior monologue could have come from Joyce and Proust, but this development has local as well as international origins. In Bengal, for instance, the modern exploration of the psyche begins with Tagore's novels and dramas, which came before Joyce's.

Although it is always difficult and risky to trace the beginning of any "influence" or similar patterns, Tagore's novels bear resonances of what we now call "modernist" or Joycean aesthetics. Nevertheless, Tagore's works are hardly read in comparison with Joyce, perhaps because Tagore's prose doesn't show the linguistic pyrotechnics of high modernism. Surprisingly, however, he was one of the first writers to explore the new technique of stream of consciousness in India. But his novel *Ghaire Bhaire* or *The Home and the World*, published in 1915, predates *Ulysses*, at a time when *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was just being serialized in *The Egoist* and had yet to be published in book form. Thus Tagore cannot be described as "imitating" Joyce, even though *Ghaire Bhaire* initially had a similar fate like *Ulysses* in terms of provoking strong reaction from the public. It used for the first time techniques like interior monologue and stream of consciousness to weave its narrative among three primary characters in the novel – two male and one female (one could very well be reminded of Bloom, Molly, and Stephen Dedalus) – to address otherwise tabooed issues. In fact, one could actually compare the soliloquy of Molly with the passages in the voice of Bimala, the female protagonist of *Ghaire Bhaire*, to understand how Tagore was using this new narrative technique to explore sexual overtones, the question of women's emancipation, and anti-colonial or even anti-national feelings, despite having not read Joyce. Thus for instance, in the chapter called "Bimala," we hear Bimala reflecting on her feelings for a man other than her husband:

> I neither suspected nor feared anything at first. I believed I was surrendering myself before the nation. . .
>
> I cannot say whether, in going through such an incoherent frenzy, this obsession might have exhausted itself in due course. But Sandipbabu could not contain himself any more – he articulated himself in such a way that the music of his words touched my being. . .
>
> To be honest to myself, the devastating form of this ardent passion engrossed my attention all day and night. I started feeling that it was particularly appealing to tear asunder like this. Despite the shame and the fear involved, it was intensely alluring for me. . . . I wanted to immerse myself in the depths of this music . . . . Each pulse-beat in my veins and each ripple of my life-blood conveyed this message to me. I realized that there was something in me because of which – I dare say – it were better for me to die. (93-5)

The above paragraph isn't yet Joycean stream of consciousness. It's maybe halfway there, though still basically an objective report after the fact, not so different from what we hear from Dickens' sadder but wiser narrators like Pip in *Great Expectations*. But Bimala's erotically charged language, where she transposes her passion for the nation with her attraction for her husband's friend Sandip, and later in the paragraph compares herself to a "veena," a musical instrument, for a modern reader becomes a *prequel* to Molly's soliloquy in *Ulysses* where through a series of uninhibited continuous sentences, without punctuation or pauses, we hear about her past lovers, desires, and life. Via the

soliloquy we know Molly's thoughts on patriarchal society, her awareness of her sexuality and body, and a life that could have been had she not married Bloom. Bimala, too, on several occasions reminisces about the differences between men and women, her life with her husband, and her desire for Sandip. In the paragraph quoted above, Bimla uses the metaphor of music and performance to explicate her sexuality and bodily desires. And is not Molly's long soliloquy nothing but an uninterrupted performance of her mind and body, a gesture of some sort?

Notice, however, that the passage quoted above, though here given in translation, is not as experimental with the form and language as Joyce is with Molly's soliloquy. By contrast, consider the paragraph below from Buddhadeva Bose's 1967 Bengali novel, *Rat Bhor Brishti* (*Rain Through the Night*, 1973), a novel that narrates the story of a couple via reminiscences, memories, monologues, and the technique of stream of consciousness to present their entire life on just one rainy night:

> And glancing over at Angshu, I felt that he wanted to hear something like that from me even now. So I said:
>
> "Why are you so late?"
>
> "For heaven's sake, where were you all this time! Didn't you notice it's been pouring – Beleghata's been turned into the Ganga: I walked to Sealdah and then took a rickshaw up to Twin Church before I could get a taxi." He spoke with such self-satisfaction, Nayonangshu, as if he'd just come after slaying a tiger in the Sundarban jungles. I remember how he'd started shouting when he spotted a

> scorpion in the bathroom a few days ago, how he'd then found a stick somewhere and cautiously, from a safe distance, hit that little thing. And he even came in and told me, "I killed it." And I had replied without looking at him, "You did a brave thing!" (Like four years ago when Bunni said, "Ma, Ma, listen – there was a crow sitting on the window sill and I chased it away!") Sometimes he seems to me like such a child, like some little boy – and, how do you think it feels for ripe young woman to have a child for a husband? What would Jayanto have done in that situation (7-8).

In just a few lines we have traveled far beyond the immediate space and time of the scene. A simple question evokes memories that reach out to incidents that occurred days or years ago, only to become reference points to speculate on the immediate present and a future possibility. A dialogue that ensues between a husband and wife ends in the thoughts of the wife, Maloti, which flow from one spectrum to another. Before long we realize the reader is asked to imagine what Maloti's lover, Jayanto, would do if a scorpion was found in the bathroom. We are, however, not sure if the final question is being raised by the author, or Maloti, or the even reader.

Another paragraph from the novel begins with an informative sentence, "These days – for a long time now – Maloti has been avoiding her husband. Her husband wants her – and why shouldn't he? – but she dislikes. . . . Actually, he just isn't aggressive, much too much of a gentleman, the type he jokingly calls bourgeoisie, precisely what Jayanto calls 'bourzeois' and so hates. But I do like him when he dresses up, puts on a

suit and goes off to the office" (11). Again, we have traversed mindscapes, from the reader's to the author's or to Maloti's. In such passages, Bose's novel shocked many readers by its exploration of love, desire, sex, life, and marriage in a stream of consciousness narrative technique. When it was published, the book created a fiery debate in Bengal. Some saw the novel as a license to adultery, as the reader is able to pry through the various intimate thoughts of the characters flowing and ebbing from the past, present, and sometimes even future. As we are informed on the opening page of the English translation, the novel was condemned by a Calcutta judge to "death for being obscene and ordered the manuscript itself be destroyed."

Bose's Joycean novel was shocking in these ways rather than by any overt stylistic extravagance. The "vernacular" literatures of India, as argued by Sen, have used the stream of consciousness and interior monologue more readily than the early Indian English authors, but were reticent towards linguistic innovation or play that we see in the Rushdies and Desanis. The excerpts quoted above do not show any particular linguistic experimentation, but a departure from the conventional narration. Sen points out several other texts that similarly used stream of consciousness. For example, the use of interior monologue was well-used in an experimental novel *Lagna Bilanga* (1961) by an Oriya writer, Gopinath Mohanty. Further, Buddhadeb Bose used stream of consciousness narration in his *Lal Megh* (1934) (The Red Cloud) for the first time in a Bengali novel (see Sen 217). The technique of stream of consciousness and interior monologue was also employed by the Bengali author Gopal Haldar—in *Ekadā* (1939) (*Ekada* 1969), *Arek Din*

(1951) (Some Day), and *Anyadin* (1950) (Some Other Day)—in order to capture the anguished memories of three captured freedom fighters sentenced to death by British authorities, where each part is occurring within a single day as in *Ulysses* (Sen 217). Something similar can also be seen in the novel *Suraj ka Satva Ghora* (1952) (*The Sun's Seventh Horse*, 1999) by Hindi author Dharamvir Bharati in which he captures the meaning of love between characters in seven afternoons. These texts written in languages other than English have focused less on linguistic innovation or in subverting the language, and more on the narrative technique, form, and stream of consciousness.

Linguistic experimentation in writings done in English

In contrast to the writings done in languages other than English, Indian English novels such as G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) exploit counter-discursive techniques as used in *Ulysses* for the subversion of colonial language. For them, language becomes the context and form, so much so that the novel itself becomes a "gesture," as we will see with Desani, of linguistic revolt, cultural mockery, and stylistic innovation. Unlike authors writing in "vernacular" languages, Indian English writers have turned to Joyce's texts for generic and linguistic subversions. In an interview given to Margot Dijkgraaf, literary critic of the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* for the series *The Crucial Book*, in which writers expound their views on the book that has most influenced their ideas, Salman Rushdie says that

> Joyce spoke against the politicizing of literature, but his language is a purposeful attempt to create an English which was just not a property of the English. He employs a lot of borrowed words from other European languages and creates an un-English kind of English. . . Certainly. The Irish did it, so did the American and the Caribbean writers. While English traveled around like that, the people felt the need to innovate it. So I did. But the Joycean innovation was the greatest of all. It is an example that deserves to be followed.[31]

Defending his linguistic play, Rushdie says that English has been "conquered" by acculturation: "we can't simply use the language in the way the British did … it needs remaking for our own purposes" (Rushdie qtd. in Elleke 201).

Certainly Rushdie used Joycean techniques. But he was not the only one. His words only echo what Raja Rao had said in the Foreword to his novel *Kanthapura*, almost three decades before him: "We cannot write like the English. We should not" (vii). Joyce, too, believed that the Irish language, although of the Indo-European family, differs from English as much as the language spoken in Rome differs from that spoken in Tehran (Sen 215), and he enriched and distorted standard English by many means, including the use of many foreign words. In *The West Looks at India* (1969), Krishna Nand Joshi gives a long list of words from various Indian languages that Joyce uses in the *Wake*. It is now an axiom that Joyce was a great innovator of words and that he believed

[31] http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/satanic_verses/joyce.html

in the suggestive power of words which could represent multiple levels of an individual's consciousness. Joyce's remark on his multi-linguistic experiments is relevant here. Joyce said he felt he could not "use words in their ordinary connexions. Used that way they do not express how things are … in the different stages—conscious, then semi-conscious, then unconscious … when morning comes … I will give them back their English language" (qtd. in Joshi 114). Stephen in the *Portrait* debates the origin of the word "tundish" and decides that the English words "home," "ale," and "Christian" are different on his and his British headmaster's lips: "The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine" (146). Clearly, Joyce was particularly aware of the position of English as the language of imperialism. In both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* Joyce writes in a manner that initiates a loss of the grandeur of English as an imperial language to become any other language. At the same time, as Ida Klitgard has argued in *Fictions of Hybridity*, via his work Joyce creates a suprahistorical language that has resemblances to the pure language that Walter Benjamin insisted on in his "The Task of the Translator."

How such experiments could be re-envisioned in India can be seen in the case of Raja Rao's 1938 novel *Kanthapura*. Set in a mythical village of India, which Rao says could be any village in India, *Kanthapura* records the colonial struggle against the British, the breaks in Indian nationalism, the victory of the Indians over the British, and the pervasive presence of Gandhi through the perspective of his devout follower, Moorthy, the protagonist of the novel. Here, I submit that the Gandhi of *Kanthapura* could be replaced by the ghostly presence of Parnell in *Ulysses*, who, like Gandhi in

Kanthapura remains in the narrative without ever being seen. Apart from not following the linear structure of a traditional narrative, the novel abounds in linguistic and stylistic innovations similar to the erasure of the difference that Stephen had felt while speaking in English with his headmaster. For instance, the abundant physical objects and mythical allusions Rao uses not only "Indianize" the English language, but also "localize" or "Kannnadaize" it. Thus, the blowing of conch, the burning of camphor, the breaking of coconut before any temple, the offering of bananas and the lightening of lamps before the goddess inflect English linguistic properties in such a manner that to replace the word "Christian" from Stephen's mouth with the word "Hindu" would not sound alien.

Indian critics typically emphasize Rao's use of motifs and terms drawn from the vernacular folk tradition, but it has less often been seen that these very borrowings serve to decolonize English in very Joycean ways. Thus, references to a number of south Indian dishes like *od'e, Happalams, sajji, payasams, chitrana*— sounding different like the word "ale" on Stephen's and his headmaster's lips—barge into the English language to create a new world. A similar effect results in Rao's narrative from the speech tunes he gives to English, for example the functional address of "No, no, Bhattare" or in the non-functional address of expressions like "Yes, sister." His general habit of using the Native words for "brother," "sister," "mother," and "father" in the narrative creates a "home" which would "other" the headmaster of the *Portrait*.

A major linguistic innovation comes out in the novel though songs. Songs are part of oral narratives, and often legitimize the strangeness of a feeling in a foreign language.

The women of the village have songs for all occasions, starting from relationship songs on mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law to songs on the harvest, festivals, marriages, praises for their village deity Kenchamma, as well as patriotic songs. The womenfolk have songs even for mourning and lamentation. Thus for instance, after Moorthy's death this is what we see in the novel being described by the narrator:

> and from the top we saw below the pariah women and the pariah girls and the pariah kids and the pariah grandmothers, beating their mouths and shouting, tight squatting on the path to stop the march of the coolies, who are moving with Murthy's body to the cremation ground, shouting and swaying and clapping hands and lamenting,
>
> > He'll never come again, He'll never come again,
> > He'll never come again, Moorthappa.
> > The God of death has sent for him,
> > Buffalo and rope and all,
> > They stole him from us, they lassoed him at night,
> > He's gone, He's gone, He's gone, Moorthappa (152).

The song not only conveys the grief of the villagers, but also assists Rao in culturalizing the text in a language not that of the villagers. The haunting line "He'll never come again" immediately affects the reader, followed with a very specific untranslatable mythic detail about Yama, the god of the death: "The God of death has sent for him, / Buffalo and rope and all."

Through the songs Rao has been successful in imparting a rural (un)translatability to the cosmopolitan language of English, as we can see in this passage: "Oh, he's gone--he's gone, Cart-Man Rudrappa; H'e, said he to his bulls, and h'e, h'e, said he to his cart,

h‘e, h‘e, h‘e, said he to the wicked whip; he’s gone -- he’s gone, he’s gone, Rudrappa,” to which another woman adds, “He’s gone. Potter Siddayya” (179-80). Here we get a striking incident where women’s wailings are merged with the sound of the cart-man. Poeticizing the language gives Raja Rao the license to depart from the standard syntactical structure of English. He employs various figures of speech to enrich his verse narrative that only lend untranslatability to the normal speech. Inversion is one of them. Consider the first line of the novel: “High on the Ghats is it, high up the steep mountains.” Sometimes reiteration becomes a medium to communicate the untranslatable poetical sensibility of the villagers in English. This feature is not just confined to the songs employed in the novel but is found also in its prose. V.Y Kantak points out that the “communal habit” of repeating words for “intensification” fulfils various functions. The ubiquitous “of course, of course” is for “solicitation.” Sometimes appeals take the form of repetition, “Do not drink, do not drink, in the name of Mahatma,” or as Kantak says, under the pressure of “anticipation and suspense” repetition becomes common, as in: “Now, we are safe, we are safe” and “Sister, who is dying? Sister, who is dying?” (Kantak 67). These undulations acquire a crooning quality induced by emotional stress and at the same time emphasize an untranslatable cultural experience that manifests in a unique style.

The novel abounds in alliteration, and breaks into verse narrative every now and then, creating a foreignness of feeling to correspond, as Walter Benjamin would say, to the “foreignness of languages” (75). Thus we have, in the very beginning of the novel

sentences like: “ages, ages, ago” (8); “pat-pat-pat” (8); “we shall sing and sing and sing” (9); or phrases like Sankara’s “Sivoham, Sivoham” (I am shiva. I am siva. Siva am I); and “Truth, Truth, and Truth was all that Moorthy said” (92), “And somewhere is heard a whistle, the mistress’s whistle, which whines and whines” (57), or “Cymbal, conch and, camphor, clapping hands and droning drums” (113). Such literary style gives a unique cultural and poetic flavor to the novel, heightened by unconventional pairings of words and a profuse use of the conjunction “and.”

Along with alliteration, climax as a figure of speech is frequently used in the novel to express the important sentiments of the villagers: “But you are a father of many children and an esteemed elder of your community and the whole village, and if you should take the ways of the Congress, then others will follow you” (76), or on the same page, “All I know is that what you told me about the Mahatma is very fine, and the Mahatma is a holy man, and if the Mahatma says what you say, let Mahatma’s word be the word of God.” Further, the similes and metaphors chosen by Rao are in harmony with the personality of the narrator and her (un)translatable cultural context. Moorthy is like “a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and brahmanic” (11). He is “as honest as an elephant” (15). We are also told that “Our Rangamma is no village kid” (35), or “I am no butcher’s son to hurt you” (35), with no direct explanation of what these sentences really suggest. A complete (un)translatability of English is achieved with indigenous terms of abuse used in the narrative. Thus we have a battle of oaths, “son of concubine,”

"son of a widow," (65), or the very culture-specific insult "I've poured my shoe-water through his throat" (65).

But it is just not English that is subverted or translated to reach a level of new linguistic (un)translatability in the novel. Rao's Foreword to the novel advocates subversion only of the colonizer's language, and to a casual reader the novel may seem to be a weapon of protest against the colonial center –in this case England. Nevertheless, the Foreword, as well as the novel itself, address complex language issues connected with the power structures that go beyond Rushdie's notion of "the empire writing back." Rao says in his Foreword that "English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up" (vii). By associating English with Sanskrit and Farsi, Rao is emphasizing the hegemony of three past empires in India, and by dividing the function of language into "intellectual" and "emotional" categories, he is preparing his readers for the linguistic subversion he performs in the novel, where this dichotomy is broken.

The dichotomy breaks when Moorthy's elevated ideas about spirituality and the national movement are not delivered in the village dialect; they find expression in a standard English. The reason for this lapse is to show a distanced village community from Moorthy's experiences in a language that doesn't translate into the village dialect. When Moorthy hallucinates seeing the Mahatma, his experience in the novel is compared with that of Arjuna in the *Mahabharata* after Krishna shows him the *Vishwaroopdarshan* (his cosmic self). The spiritual transformation that comes to Moorthy is rendered in a

language that is not of the grandmother or the narrator in the novel. The divorce in the narrative results from the dichotomy in the nature of the language that Rao talks about in the Foreword. It is, of course, a deliberate choice, and not a mistake that Moorthy's spiritually elevated soul after fasting is described in a voice that lacks alliteration, climax, metaphors, similes, profuse use of the conjunction "and," or even repetition: "Then he sat himself down by the central pillar and slipped back into meditation. Why was it he could meditate so deeply? Thoughts seemed to ebb away to the darkened shores and leave the illuminated consciousness to rise up into the back of the brain, he had explained to Seenu" (69).

In the process of analyzing the power relations between the colonizers and the colonized, the novel captures the dissent against the highly venerated national movement that forms its theme, either by a complete absence of (untranslated or translated) phrases in Kannada, or by the presence of untranslated Hindi phrases that the villagers repeat out of habit. This opposition is recorded either in total absence of the native language when it comes to nationalistic feelings or by expressive patriotic thoughts through the excessive use of banal untranslated statements from various languages that pose a threat to Kannada. Even though the novel is about Kannada-speaking villagers and their participation in the national movement, yet the native language of the villagers as well as of the author is never employed to articulate emotions connected with nationalism in particular and the national movement in general. Rao makes use of innumerable Kannada dishes and traditions, Hindu rituals, Sanskrit phrases, Hindu ceremonies, festivals, and

names of Gods, but he never picks one word of Kannada when dealing with the national movement. The theme of the novel is about the untranslatable transformation that has taken place after the freedom struggle in Kanthapura. As the character Range Gowda says, "there's neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura" (184). The freedom struggle has brought an end to a community.

The villagers are at risk of losing their identity not only to English but also to other communities, mainly to the Hindi-speaking populace, that were to replace the British after independence. The threat becomes obvious when one day Ratna, daughter of a freedom fighter, wishes to sing an English song at a marriage while on the other hand an educated man like Sankara, a successful lawyer and popular in his village, refuses to speak English and penalizes anybody who speaks in that language. But despite being a Kannad himself, Sankara goes out of his way to praise and even rave about Hindi. We are told that he does not speak to his mother in Kannada; instead he uses Hindi and asserts that it would become the national language of India one day. We are told by the narrator: "He did not say 'How are you?' in Kannada but took to the northern manner and said 'Ram-Ram'. But what was astonishing was the way he began to talk Hindi to his mother, who understood not a word of it, but she said she would learn it one day; and he spoke nothing but Hindi to his daughter" (104). This brings us to question the authenticity of nationalistic feelings coupled with untranslated Hindi phrases throughout the novel, like "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" or "Inquilab zindabad" and "Vande Matram" (the Hindi "national song" promoted by the nationalists). The freedom movement is for India but not

for Kanthapura; that is why all reference or conversation about the freedom struggle is in Hindi and not in Kannada.

The campaign for the employment of a culturally (un)translatable language in *Kanthapura* accomplishes a dual purpose for Rao: not only is he able to explore the potential of a "Kannada English," but he presents it as a measure of resistance against the growing hegemony of Hindi (at the time of the writing of the novel soon to become the national language of independent India). In many ways, the linguistic innovations in *Kanthapura* are comparable with those of Latin American authors such as José María Arguedas and Juan Rulfo, who challenged their readers with a Spanish which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would say contains a "high coefficient" of a minor/indigenous language. *Kanthapura* has popular Kannada phrases translated into English without changing any words. For instance the phrase, "make our stomachs burn" is used instead of "heartache" or "heartburn." There are also numerous South Indian rural expressions in the novel, for example, Subba Chetty calls to his bulls "Ho" and "H'e-H'e" (1), or when Suranna and Rangappa call Bhatta every morning before his house: "H'e Bhattar'e, are you up? Time to go to the river, h'e !" (23), or when Lakkamma uses the same expression when she sees a snake: "H'e, H'e, H'e, a snake!, a huge snake! A cobra!" (47). Yet another case of typical south Indian expression is used when Ramayya sees the cobra while passing through jungle and he cries "Ayyo … Ayyoo" (49). Then, there are certain culture-specific phrases translated into English, unintelligible not only to a foreign reader but also to an Indian not from the south of India. For instance, local knowledge is needed

to decode the expression "before the cock has time to crow three times," which in Kannada means that the action was done speedily, or the phrase "let them set fire to their dhoti and sari and die" (4), meaning let them destroy themselves.

Sometimes there are Sanskrit and Kannada expressions and words not translated in the novel. The untranslated words, of course, have a functional value in postcolonial literature (see, e.g., Brahms): they signify certain cultural experiences or objects or rituals which can never be reproduced accurately in a foreign language, and this is the case in India where regional languages can be as foreign to Indians as French could be to a Greek. Thus, words like *thothi*, *maya*, *vada*, *jamadar*, *sahib*, *charka*, *sravan*, *bhajans*, *thirtham*, *lathi*, *prayaschitta*, *dasarahavu*, *thoo!thoo!thoo!*, *mandap*, *dharma sastras*, *vedanta*, *sutras*, *gaas*, assist in domestication of English by drawing it closer to the new cultural environment while it excludes other Indians from the discourse who do not speak languages that have these words in common.

Rao, however, is not dissociating English at just the lexical and syntactical level: he is creating a whole new language for a community. By clothing the language with myths, local beliefs, religious rituals, social practices, a cultural outlook, and superstitions, Rao advances in untranslating English. Thus, we are told in the novel that the plantation workers would not have allopathic medicines but would hang "a three piece bit and a little rice and an areca nut" (52) on the roof to get rid of fever. Superstitions like "why, my right eye winks, we shall have a grand harvest" (110) are new to English, as well as other north Indian languages, as are certain community-

specific phrases like “she will come home in a few week’s time” (22), a reference to a young girl about to have puberty, or even a way of bidding farewell: “and they get a coconut and betel-leaf goodbye”. Also, Rao sometimes uses a corresponding Kannada proverb in lieu of an English proverb or an idiom when the English one could have conveyed adequately the meaning. For instance, the proverb, “crow-and-sparrow story” (15) is used instead of “cock and bull story,” or “every squirrel has his day” in place of “every dog has his day” (77). In the first case the “crow and sparrow” story is a famous parable in India. Without any changes Rao has been able to convey his thought to both audiences, English and Kannada. In the second case, however, a squirrel has been used as a substitute for a dog, which is a stretch for anyone who does not speak Kannada.

The linguistic untranslatables in the novel are ample and could be argued to have been a result of Rao’s European connections: Rao wrote the novel in France and writes in his Foreword that “we cannot write only as Indians” (vii). Rao describes himself as a young man as “a south Indian Brahmin, nineteen, spoon-fed on English, with just enough Sanskrit to know I knew so little, with an indiscreet education in Kannada, my mother tongue, the French literary scene overpowering me. If I wanted to write, the problem was, what should be the appropriate language of expression, and what my structural model” (“Entering the Literary” 537-8). In other words, a man educated in four languages tries to give expression to his thoughts in his own idiom. Just as the language in Joyce’s textual world is fluid, free of syntactical prisons, and often interspersed with many other languages of the world, Rao’s text demands constant active participation from readers in

understanding polyglottism, heteroglossia, cultural untranslatables, and neologisms captured in the text.

A gesture of (un)translatability in Desani's novel

G. V Desani, a contemporary of Rao, takes neologism, heteroglossia, polyglottism, and word-play to another level. His novel *All About H. Hatter* demands a translatability that goes beyond understanding Indian English or other "vernacular" languages. Unlike Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, where Joyce becomes an inspiration for an unaccountable murderous impulse, Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948) is written to incite an assassination of the author. The goal of Hatterr, the pseudo co-writer of the novel, as we are told in "All About. . .," a preface signed by Desani, is to assassinate Desani himself, a fate that Desani decides to embrace: "I'll *earn* me an assassination! Be entitled. Have the Honour" (20). Desani tells the reader that perhaps he has been seeking an assassination without knowing it, "and if this book seems likely to lead" him to it, "and certainly to the deserving of it, why be sorry? Why not make a song about it? Why suffer an anonymous letter-writer's conscience?" (21). In a peculiar way, the novel does invite an academic assassination, more even than Rao's text with its contemplation of the murder of the chair of the English department. After all, as we are told, the novel was rejected multiple times by various people on the pretext of unintelligibility, wrong grammar, and profanity. Moreover, one is not sure how to categorize what Desani, or Hatterr, or both, have written. A small repartee in a prefatory note called "*Warning!*"

precedes the author's note, informing the readers about the text's nature. The dialogue is as follows:

> *Indian middle-man* (to Author): Sir, if you do not identify your composition a novel, how then do we itemize it? Sir, the rank and file is entitled to know.
>
> *Author* (to Indian middle-man): Sir, I identify it a *gesture*. Sir, the rank and file is entitled to know.
>
> *Indian middle-man* (to Author): Sir, there is no immediate demand for gestures, There is immediate demand for novels. Sir, we are literary agents not free agents.
>
> (12)

This dialogue is extremely important, as it informs the reader about the literary and the material merit of the "composition." It is, as we are told, not a novel, a genre in demand, hence, all conventional expectations will be subverted. But since it is not a novel, chances are that the "literary agents" might not even consider it as a work of art. In this pithy rendezvous the author, apparently an Anglo-Indian writer, distinguishes his work as a gesture. The question is what kind of gesture? And of all things, why a gesture? I argue in this section that Desani's gesture is a gesture of (un)translatability that lets him speak of that which is unsaid in the novel.

Let us recall that the prefatory page of warning entitled begins with the following quotation from someone simply called "*Anglo-Indian writer*": "'Melodramatic *gestures* against public security are a common form of self-expression in the East. For instance, an Indian peasant, whose house has been burgled, will lay a tree across a railway line,

hoping to derail a goods train, just to show his opinion of life. And the Magistrates are far more understanding . . .'" (12). A curious mix of words and phrases has been chosen: "melodramatic," "public security," "gesture," and "opinion of life." The private grief of the peasant translates into disrupting the public life. And although the translated gesture is overtly "melodramatic," the authorities are kind enough to understand the derailing of the goods train. Note that derailing the trains was in fact one of the most common ways for Indians to protest against the colonial rule. The use of this anecdote by Desani before the dialogue with the literary agent, who is not to be mistaken as a free agent, is thus significant. It portends, by all means, the public disruption – linguistic, cultural, racial, religious, literary, and generic – that Desani intends to cause. The novel, however, makes no direct reference to the colonial regime, nationalism, or even Gandhi like Rao's text. It is almost mute about the social and political chaos of its time, though published in 1948, a year after India became independent. In *Ulysses* at least Parnell is mentioned, and Stephen imagines his ghost. Even in *Kanthapura*, the villager-hero Moorthy hallucinates seeing Gandhi. *Hatterr*, however, remains oddly quiet about its time, except in this melodramatic gesture, an oblique reference to disruption of the colonial rule. Desani, however, addresses those crucial issues with the very gesture of linguistic (un)translatability.

Once the narrative finally begins to get under way, following several further melodramatic gestures, the narrator, Hatterr, introduces himself in a humorous vein:

Biologically, I am fifty-five of the species.

> One of my parents was a European, Christian-by-faith merchant merman (seaman). From which part of the Continent? Wish I could tell you. The other was an Oriental, a Malay Peninsula-resident lady, a steady non-voyaging, non-Christian human (no mermaid). From which part of the Peninsula? Couldn't tell you either (31).

My intention in quoting the above paragraph is not to show Hatterr as Bhabha's "hybrid," or a "go-between," it is to illuminate the untranslatability of his experience, bordering on irreverence toward geopolitical location, religious tenets, and language.

Despite being written in a Joycean vein, and acknowledged by authors like Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie as a standard to imitate, Desani's novel has not been a favorite either with the public or with the academic world, either locally or globally. T.S. Eliot's ambiguous claim that in all his experience he had never come across something like *Hatterr* could also not rescue the novel from obscurity. Kushwant Singh's wish to nominate Desani for the Nobel Prize, and the novel's brief rediscovery by American academics in the 1970s didn't do any justice either. Desani's novel has largely been out of print during the past forty years, and in criticism it remains a text mentioned only in passing with reference to Rushdie or Joyce. Till now there exists only one book-length study of Desani's work, and a website, very appropriately called *All About G. V. Desani* (www.desani.com). It is pertinent to question Desani's loss in the literary market, especially when his book has been regarded so highly by esteemed authors.

Desani'slong absences from the literary world only fueled his obscurity. Desani wrote just one novel, followed in 1950 by a poetic prose work, *Hali*, and no other books in the remaining fifty years of his long life, apart from a late collection of stories in 1991. Yet he had no doubts about his literary genius, regardless of sounding a reticent Anglo-Indian writer in his preface to *Hatterr*, where he only wants a murder as a reward. In fact, as Sheela Reddy writes, "When he visited India, in the first flush of his literary triumph, and was staying at Singh's home on Janpath, a small literary evening was organised to meet the famous author. "There are only two great novelists," Desani told his audience in Singh's living room. "One is James Joyce and the other is your humble servant."[32] Perhaps the *gesture* was born before its time. Indeed, a brief obituary notice in the newsletter of the Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies says that if "a classic can be defined as a book that everyone has heard of but very few have read, *Hatterr* had definitely attained that status." The obituary continues: that in several ways, Desani "was a writer born before the readers were ready for his kind of writing. In *Hatterr* he played with the English language, Indianising it with comic abandon and whimsical self-mockery, and celebrated hybridity and dislocation long before Salman Rushdie made such things trendy"[33]

Indeed, the anxious hope to find a reader, *just one* reader, who would read Desani's gesture for what it stands for, is evident from the very beginning in the novel. The hope, however, only ends in a series of gradual disappointments. When the

[32] http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?210550.
[33] http://iaclals.8m.com/nl/01jan/01jan11.htm

manuscript is sent to the typist, it is returned the same week with a rejection slip that pronounces it "Nonsense." Describing the nature of the nonsense in a very straightforward manner, the typist tells Desani that it is not the sort of nonsense "young girls in the office ought to see" (14). Recall the objections raised by the chair in Seth's novel against *Ulysses*. Moreover, we are told that another person who reviews his manuscript refers him to a well-known psychiatrist, who is more than willing to help him professionally. Ironically, when Desani does find a "kind person" ready to type the manuscript, it comes back incomplete, as the typist's clergyman brother is about to visit her, and under no circumstances does she want the manuscript to be found by him. A disappointed but "stubborn" Desani decides to give a run of "mass-reaction," and approaches a book-keeper who rejects it as "slang," a cashier who advises him to pursue some other career, and finally a soldier who responds to Desani's all questions on the manuscript's quality with the word "Dandy."

If this wasn't enough to lead the reader to abandon the book or itemize it as gesture of lunacy, or untranslatability, Desani recounts the communication that he received fromthe director of a "Short Story Writing College":

> The Studies Director wrote he was returning the MS. herewith. (Fair enough.) The English and the grammar were in need of a drastic overhaul, he's my sincerely. The Reader said he hadn't seen the like of it, and couldn't apply the usual yardstick to this. (Fair, too). *A 'clean' copy, however, was absolutely essential.* While debating if I could at all grant *that*, I chanced to review my amateur but

> best-ever typing. It seemed someone in care of the Studies Director had had a day off. It was he who had 'corrected' the idiom, grammar, English, and look at the scribbling! Between lines, in the margins, up, down, across! Dear, *dear!* My only copy! (15-16).

The reader's suspicions have received the official verdict: the English language and the grammar need an overhauling. The typist was right. Desani has most certainly earned an assassination. A perturbed Desani exclaims: "Now what? The spellings had to be learnt all over again, *brother*!" (16).

But Desani is undeterred. He remains stubborn, and decides to seek the specialists' opinion on his manuscript. He informs us that he approached Betty Bloomsbohemia – notice the reference to Joyce along with Virginia Woolf, "the Virtuosa with knobs-on" (16). She questions him vigorously, thereby "honouring" him as he had never been before. She insists, Desani tells us, that he explain "the ABC of the book." To which Desani responds:

> A man's choice, Missbetty, is conditioned by his past: his experience. That's true of his words too. I dare you, there are *other* ways of saying 'Aspirin'. 'Corpsereviver', 'Acetyl-Salicylic compound'. To one, *M.P.* stands for a *Member of Parliament*. To another, it might mean *major parasite.* Depends on his experience. That's all why this book isn't English as she is wrote or spoke. Not verbal contortionism, I assure. . . As for the *arbitrary* choice of the words and constructions you mentioned. Not intended by me to invite analysis. They are

there because, I think, they are natural to H. Hatterr. . . Jot this down, too. I never was involved in the struggle for newer forms of expressions (16-7).

Here we are not only told that there are several ways of saying things, ranging from the most mundane to specialized, but also that the very meaning of a word might be inconsistent, and not as intended. Moreover, this inconsistency in speech or even in meaning could come very naturally to some, evoking a shared "(un)translatability" in the global south and beyond.

Translatability is defined by Walter Benjamin in the "The Task of the Translator" as the laws that govern translation – a mode. He explains it as an essential quality of certain works" that "manifests itself in its translatability" (71). In a highly hermetic and esoteric language he further goes on to describe translation and translatability in terms of life, death, god, soul, fruit, kernel, and afterlife. Benjamin is highly ambiguous in his exposition of translation as a mode, and translatability as the essential feature that governs translation. But it is this ambiguity that produces layers of meaning, and gives scope to imagine translatability not as a mechanical transference of information from one language or text to another, but a biological and organic relation between and amongst languages that need not even involve a textual transference, as long as it conveys the "intentions" between, amongst, and within languages by representing it in an "embryonic or intensive form" (72). Indeed, this kinship brought out between languages via translation is profounder than the similarities between two works of literature, as it does not require likeness or faithfulness between words, but an emphasis on "intention" that

lies under each language as a whole. Further, according to Benjamin, this is "an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language" (74). Thus, from the very beginning, translation, according to Benjamin, is not between texts, but "intentions" that don't exist in isolation and convey suprahistorical and supranational tendencies in languages. In this respect, Desani, Rao, and Joyce share theuse of (un)translatability as a mode and gesture to connect and disconnect within and beyond languages.

In *Ulysses* Stephen Dedalus says that "gesture, not music not odour, would be a universal, the gift of tongues rendering visible not the lay sense but the first entelechy, the structural rhythm" (Joyce 403). Although here Dedalus evokes the concept of a universal language, in actuality he means a language that visually gestures toward a structural rhythm that exists in all tongues, or what Benjamin calls the "suprahistoric" and "supranational" connections among languages. And despite the semblance of an existing universal language in Joyce's work, *Ulysses* and the *Wake* very much reveal, as Jesse Schotter has said in his "Verbivocovisuals: James Joyce and the Problem of Babel" that "No system of language in Joyce's book can be fixed and made stable, nor can one clearly and unambiguously communicate meaning. Instead meaning resides in the interpretive capacities of each reader, each listener" (100). This means, as Desani had told Miss Bloomsbohemia, that an "M.P." could signify both a member of the parliament and also a major parasite, and perhaps more. The (un)translatability of the word would depend on who are the speaker and the listener. Over the course of its 318 pages,

Desani's unitemized *gesture* evokes an assassination not just of the author but of all that stands itemized. It is this intentionality and (un)translatability that the author hides in his linguistic play and innovations.

Late in the novel, after Hatterr's various adventures across the country with fake saints, sages, and women, his friend Banerrjii, almost a clownish figure whom Bhabha would call a colonial mimic, says:

> Although you don't at all like me to mention this, but you yourself used to be so literary! Why have you put out the light? On the other hand, you would have found creation exhausting. It is, I wholeheartedly agree. But you must not give up. What happened to your project to translate dear Omar's *Rubá'iyát* medically? I still treasure the stanza of your *Dictum Khayyam*, the first attempt you made at that formidable task. . . .I cannot understand you! I am convinced you have it in you. You should please finish the work – and *Resurrexi!* The world is waiting! (266-7).

The idea of translating Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* medically is nothing but a ridiculously impossible task, as absurd as the scene in which a lion eats meat on Hatterr's chest to please the woman who owns a circus. Yet we see that Banerrji has memorized the first stanza of the ode as rendered by Hatterr in medical Latin. The only response that we see after Banerrji recites the ode in Latin is Hatterr's strong statement, "Hell, no one is going to make a damme *writer* out of *me*, not even a macaronical!" – a writer of multilingual verse (267). But not long afterwards, Hatterr rhetorically asks Banerrji if words could

ever communicate the "Truth." All "words," Hatterr tells us, are "pointers, indicators, symbols: and there isn't a single word in any lingo, dialect or doggerel, which is absolutely cast-true, suggesting in the exact infallible, *Truth*" (283). And as if this was not enough to confuse Banerrji, he explains, "What do you expect of a damme *writer* of words, anyway? *Truth*? Hell, you will get *contrast*, and no mistake!" (284).

The choice of giving contrast in place of the "truth" has the result that on a superficial level the novel is nothing but a virtuosity of linguistic acrobatics, seemingly with nothing profound to say on the historical and political chaos of the time. There is no Gandhi, or Moorthy, or even the kind of colonial language dispute that we saw in *Kanthapura*, and even the professor from Seth's novel would not find a glimpse of Paratha Chatterjee's discourse on the private and public space. For Hatterr, and for his "co-author" Desani, a "*Truth*-thing, or a *Truth*-idea, might be an *a*," but by "the time a feller has the notion of this *a*, a sensation of it, its nature changes. What a fella has is not an *a*, but an awareness of an *a*. . . . He hasn't the true *a*, but a *translation!* (283-4). In fact, what the readers hold in their hands is nothing but an untranslatability of a translation, one that as Benjamin would say is inexpressible not because of its "inherent difficulty, but because of the looseness with which meaning attaches" to it (81).

Characterizing G.V. Desani as more cynical, idiosyncratic, and modernist than Joyce, Srinivas Aravamudan says in his "Postcolonial Affliations" that *Ulysses* is a mock-epic which is raised by Desani to a third degree in *Hatterr*. Aravamudan warns readers against reading Desani and Rushdie as "postcolonial baboos, signifying monkeys

who demonstrate cultural richness," and demands different reading formations that do not replicate "the new orientalism that is postcolonial literature" (*Transcultural Joyce* 124-5). For Aravamudan, reading Desani as imitating Joyce "because he gestures towards him would be to accuse Joyce of plagiarizing Homer" (123). And yet if not to read Desani, an already forgotten author, in the Joycean vein then how to approach him? In his article on "Latin America and Comparative Literature," Roberto González Echevarría says that a redefined comparative literature could use "European literatures in the 'marginal' literatures as a way of remapping the field and rewriting the canon" (98). The issue, he says, would then not be of comparing but rewriting, where novels by Fuentes would be used to teach Henry James, and those by Lezama Lima to read Joyce (99). For him, as with Aravamudan, the question would then not be of how these works agree, but how they disagree and differ, and how readings from the "margins" would mobilize elements in the "hegemonic" texts that were previously inert. Keeping those thoughts in mind, we now venture into Latin America, and its connection with Joyce and Joycean aesthetics.

Joyce and Latin America

The impulse to murder a professor that we've seen in Vikram Seth continues in Latin America, though this time it is a plot to kill not an opponent of Joyce but the devoted interpreter of a Joycean encyclopedic fiction. Dr. Yu Tsun, a German secret agent, kills Professor Stephen Albert in Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths" in order to convey to the Germans the name of a city that was to be attacked. But before being

shot by Dr. Yu Tsun, Stephen Albert reveals to him that he has finally solved the labyrinth that a writer named Ts'ui Pên created in his unfinished novel. Interestingly, on his way to Albert's house, Tsun was thinking about the genius of Ts'ui Pên's artistry in creating an intricate novel, where all men had lost their way. Clearly, Borges is partly evoking sprawling Chinese novels like *Dream of the Red Chamber*, but equally the story gestures toward Joyce's labyrinthine novels, in terms recalling Borges's views of them. Professor Stephen Albert, decoder of the labyrinth, ironically echoes Stephen Dedalus, while Ts'ui Pên himself is an avatar of Shem the Penman, the devilish writer in (and of) *Finnegans Wake*. Like Joyce's last novel, Ts'ui Pên's *Garden of Forking Paths* is "a cyclical, or circular volume, a volume whose last page would be identical to its first" (125), a work of diverse alternatives, whose characters are continually reborn in different times and forms, much like the *Wake*'s HCE or "Here Comes Everybody."

Borges's literary relationship with Joyce is to a great extent an example of what I term the "Bloomdian complex," where a young author (generally the son) harbors the intentions of killing his admired author (generally the father) in order to replace him, though here it is the professor-reader who is murdered. A lover of short fiction, who declared the death of the novel, Borges was never able to reconcile his love-hate relationship with Joyce (see Salgado, *From Modernism* 33-47). In fact, the death of Funes in "Funes the Memorious" is a strong statement by Borges on the death of an ideal reader of Ulyssean-like novels, who must have an encyclopedic memory to understand a meta-text like *Ulysses* or the *Wake*. As pointed out by César Augusto Salgado in his "Barroco

Joyce: Jorge Luis Borges's and José Lezama Lims's Antagonistic Readings," Borges pictures *Ulysses* as the last phase in the dissolution of the genre: "Isn't *Ulysses*—with its charts, itineraries, and precisions—the splendid death rattle of an entire genre?" (65). However, Borges was not always anti-Joycean with regard to aesthetics (see, e.g., Novillo-Corvalán). While writing on *Ulysses* in his "El Ulíses de Joyce" (1925), the twenty-six-year-old Borges had proudly declared:

> Soy el primer aventurero hispánico que ha arribado al libro de Joyce….Hablaré de él con la licencia que mi admiración me confiere y con la vaga intensidad que hubo en los viajadores antiguos, el describir la tierra que era nueva frente a su asombro errante y en cuyos relatos se aunaron lo fabuloso y lo verídico, el decurso del Amazonas y la Ciudad de los Césares. (Borges 3).
>
> Translated as:
>
> I am the first traveler from the Hispanic world to set foot upon the shores of *Ulysses*. . . .I will speak of it with the license my admiration lends me and with the murky intensity of those ancient explorers who described lands new to their nomadic amazement, and whose stories about the Amazons and the City of the Caesars combined truth and fantasy (12).[34]

By using the marine metaphor Borges was able to attach his name permanently to *Ulysses* in Latin America, even though the first one to write on it was actually Antonio

[34] *Selected Non Fictions*. Translated by Allen, Jill Levine, and Weinberger.

Marichalar, who had published an article on *Ulysses* in 1924 in *Revista de Occidente* (see Pérez Simón 122).

But Borges's initial enthusiasm was short lived, and he started criticizing neologisms, word-play, and the high order of signification and language games in Joyce's works. Later, in his "Course in English Literature" Borges described *Ulysses* as a frustrated attempt to "replace its lack of unity for a system of laborious and useless symmetries" (Pérez Simón 126). A similar condemnation is repeated in an interview that Borges gave to Richard Burgin, published in *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges* (1969), where he retorts: "Well, by the time it is read through, you know thousands and thousands of circumstances about the characters, but you don't know them … you know all the book they read…but you don't really know them. It's as if Joyce had gone over them with a microscope or a magnifying glass" (Burgin 36).

As Borges grew older he became disgruntled with Joyce's novels. The reasons could be numerous: Joyce's ability to twist and invent language seemed a monstrous talent to Borges that he secretly wished for, and in addition Borges was uncomfortable with Joyce's treatment of sexuality and other tabooed subjects. Interestingly, Borges defends censorship while mentioning Joyce:

> I know that everyone opposes the idea of censorship of literary works: in my case, I believe the censorship can be justified, when executed with probity and not used to conceal persecutions of personal, racial, or political nature … A skillful writer is able to say without infringing good manners and conventions of his time … It

> will be said that one thing is Joaquín Belda's pornography (which I do not remember having read) and another, James Joyce's occasional scatology, whose historic and aesthetic values nobody can deny. But the dangers of literature are in direct proportion with the talent of its authors. To affirm that nobody has the right to modify Joyce's works, and that every modification or suppression is a sacrilegious mutation, is a mere argument of authority … As for me, I suspect that all work is a draft and that modifications, even made by a magistrate, may be beneficial. (qtd. in Pérez Simón 130-31)

Andrés Pérez Simón interprets Borges's dislike of *Ulysses* as personal. In fact, in the prologue to his book *The Conspirators,* Borges mentions, a few months before his death, that "theories can be admirable encouragements … but at the same time can engender monsters or museum pieces ...We just have to remember James Joyce's interior monologue" (32-3). Borges, perhaps, here is referencing his own translation of Molly's soliloquy.

Despite a complicated relationship with James Joyce, Borges was highly impressedthe same artistic talents that he often criticized. His late poem "Invocation to Joyce," included in the 1969 collection *Elogio de la sombra,* is a testimony to his admiration:

> Scatttered in scattered capitals,
> solitary and many,
> we played at being the first Adam
> who gave names to things.
> Down the vast slopes of night
> that extend into dawn

we searched (I remember it still) for the words
of the miin, of death, of the morning,
and of the other usages of man.
We were imagism, cubism,
the conventicals and sects
that the credulous universities venerate.
We invented the lack of punctuation,
the leaving out of capital letters,
the stanzas in the form of a dove
from the libraries of Alexandria.
Ash, the work of our hands,
and the glowing fire our faith.
You, meanwhile, forged
in the cities of exile
in that exile which was
your loathed and chosen instrument,
the weapon of your art,
you raised your ardorous labyrinths,
infinitesimal and infinite,
admirably ignoble,
more populous than history.
We shall have died without having made out
the bioform beast or the rose
which are the center of your labyrinth,
but the memory holds on its talismans,
its Virgilian echoes,
and so in the streets of the night
your splendid infernos survive,
your many cadences and metaphors,
the gold glints of your shadow.
What does our cowardice matter if there is on earth
a single valiant man,
what does sadness matter if there was in time
somebody who called himself happy,
what does my lost generation matter,
that vague mirror,
if your books justify it.
I am the others. I am all those
whom your obstinate rigor has redeemed.
I am those you do not know and those you continue to save. (*Selected Poems* 287-289)

Invocación a Joyce

Dispersos en dispersas capitales,
solitarios y muchos,
jugábamos a ser el primer Adán
que dio nombre a las cosas.
Por los vastos declives de la noche
que lindan con la aurora,
buscamos (lo recuerdo aún) las palabras
de la luna, de la muerte, de la mañana
y de los otros hábitos del hombre.
Fuimos el imagismo, el cubismo,
los conventículos y sectas
que las crédulas universidades veneran.
Inventamos la falta de puntuación, la omisión de mayúsculas,
las estrofas en forma de paloma
de los bibliotecarios de Alejandría.
Ceniza, la labor de nuestras manos
y un fuego ardiente nuestra fe.
Tú, mientras tanto, forjabas en las ciudades del destierro,
en aquel destierro que fue
tu aborrecido y elegido instrumento,
el arma de tu arte,
erigías tus arduos laberintos,
infinitesimales e infinitos,
admirablemente mezquinos,
más populosos que la historia.
Habremos muerto sin haber divisado
la biforme fiera o la rosa
que son el centro de tu dédalo,
pero la memoria tiene sus talismanes, sus ecos de Virgilio,
y así en las calles de la noche perduran
tus infiernos espléndidos,
tantas cadencias y metáforas tuyas,
los oros de tu sombra.
Que importa nuestra cobardía si hay en la tierra
un solo hombre valiente,
qué importa la tristeza si hubo en el tiempo
alguien que se dijo feliz,
qué importa mi perdida generación,
ese vago espejo,

si tus libros la justifican.
Yo soy los otros. Yo soy todos aquellos
que ha rescatado tu obstinado rigor.
Soy los que no conoces y los que salvas (*Selected Poems* 286-288).

In the above poem we see that the poetic "I" is admiring the work of James Joyce. The speaker compares the busy artistic world of international modernism with the creative activity of Joyce. While the rest of the avant-garde was busy naming living things, eradicating punctuation, omitting capital letters, calling themselves imagists and cubists, and getting credit from the universities, Joyce created his "pathless labyrinths" – *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. The poem begins with the collective "we," and proceeds through "you" (Joyce) to reach the subjective – though still collective – "I." For the poetic speaker, the efforts of the "lost generation" hardly matter now because the poetic speaker, in reality, has been rescued by Joyce's "pain and care." Unfortunately, however, the "I" in the poem is unknown to Joyce. The poem is very elegiac in spirit, and truly conveys Borges' strong feelings of reverence for Joyce. A similar tone of reverence and idealism is seen in the second poem that he wrote on Joyce in the same collection, called simply "**James Joyce**":

En un día del hombre están los días
del tiempo, desde aquel inconcebible
día inicial del tiempo, en que un terrible
Dios prefijó los días y agonías
hasta aquel otro en que el ubicuo río
del tiempo terrenal torne a su fuente,
que es lo Eterno, y se apague en el presente,
el futuro, el ayer, lo que ahora es mío.
entre el alba y la noche está la historia
universal. Desde la noche veo
a mis pies los caminos del hebreo,

Cartago aniquilada, Infierno y Gloria.
Dame, Señor, coraje y alegría
para escalar la cumbre de este día (*Selected Poems* 272).

"James Joyce":

In one day of mankind are all the days
of time, from that unimaginable
first day of time, when a formidable
God prearranged the days and agonies,
to that other days when the perpetual river
of earthly time flows round to its headwaters,
the Eternal, and is extinguished in the present,
the future, the past, the passing—what is now mine.
The story of the world is told from dawn
to darkness. From the depths of the river I've seen
at my feet the wanderings of the Jews,
Carthage destroyed, Hell, and Heaven's bliss.
Grant me, Lord, the corage and the joy
I need to scale the summit of this day (*Selected Poems* 273).

Here Leopold Bloom, and the Joycean narrative style of encompassing all eternity in just a day, are being referenced, mingled with echoes of *Finnegans Wake*, in which Anna Livia Plurabelle flows endlessly back to her source. If the previous poem was about the stylistic technique and linguistic innovation, this one speaks more about the entire cosmos in the Joycean world captured in just a couple of pages. Ironically, the young Borges had praised all these aspects in Joyce's work only to dismiss them later, and then again come back to these praises at a later stage in his life.

In his *Journey through the Labyrinth*, Gerald Martin argues that a number of writers in twentieth-century Latin America saw in Joyce a potential to narrate the colonial and postcolonial experiences of their nations in the genre of novel. As Dr. Yu Tsun

remarks of *The Garden of Forking Paths*, his ancestor's novel was perhaps less remarkable itself than the fact that "a man of a distant empire was restoring them to me on an island in the West in the course of a desperate mission" (126). Martin considers Latin American boom and post-boom writers as practicing Joycean aesthetics in their novels, but Martin goes on to ask a relevant question: "Is 'Joyce' something that is bound to happen to each or to most cultures anyway at a given moment of technocratic-capitalist development, or did Latin America simply imitate an original model some forty years too late, when the conditions for such assimilation were finally favorable?" (140). Martin's questions are not very different from Franco Moretti's, but the example of Borges shows that Martin's concern with belatedness is misplaced. Borges had begun to incorporate and transculturate Joyce at an early age and within Joyce's own lifetime. As with Borges, the works of writers like, Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Angel Asturias, and José Lezama Lima or Desani and Rao cannot be called a blind imitation of Joycean aesthetics; instead, they can be appreciated by a "new type of reader" (Salgado 80), finding their own paths through Joyce's "infinitesimal and infinite" labyrinths.

Conclusion

In the beginning of my chapter I had proposed that even if common "linguistic contact zones" do not exist, as for instance between Latin America and South Asia, a comparative approach, especially with respect to world writers, would yield beneficial

results in postcolonial discourses. David Damrosch, in "World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age," writes,

> the James Joyce who used to be a central figure in the study of European modernism now inspires ambitious collection of articles with titles like *Semicolonial Joyce* and *Transnational Joyce*. Undeniably, comparatists today are giving more and more attention to "various contestatory, subaltern or, marginal perspectives," as the Bernheimer committee hoped we would, yet these perspectives are applied as readily to the major works of the "old" cannon as to the emergent works of the postcanon (44-5).

Damrosch's concerns remind us of the scene from Seth's novel where the exclusion of Joyce from the syllabus had inspired a "murderous impulse" and had thrown the faculty members of the university into a dilemma. In an age when literary canons are being contested from within and outside national traditions, one wonders about the benefits of reading repeatedly "established" and "iconic" writers like Joyce. Would it not be equally important to read some other authors instead of Joyce? I hope I have shown here how productively we can triangulate our readings of "hypercanonical" and "peripheral" writers both within and across national and regional literary cultures. Contrapuntal reading of texts such as *All About H. Hatterr* and "The Garden of Forking Paths" can expand our ideas of aesthetics and open doors to unforeseen results. Moreover, such a reading can introduce us to authors who are located beyond the common "linguistic contact zones," allowing us to read the Guatemalan Asturias together with the Bengali

Bibhutibhushon Bondopaddhae or Indian English author Rao with Borges, either via Joyce or not. This would further us in going beyond the usual debates on dichotomized comparisons between authors from the "old" canon and the "new" counter-canon or categories of colonial "self" and the "other," "centers" and "peripheries," "major languages" and "minor literatures." In this way, like Borges' Ts'ui Pên, we can make our way through "a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times" (127).

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Could a soul crawl away at last unshriveled which
to its "own fusing senses" had clung beyond English?

If someone asks where Shahid has disappeared,
he's waging a war (no, *jung*) beyond English.

My conclusion demands a return to Agha Shahid Ali's poem "Beyond English." The last two couplets from Shahid Ali's poems almost acquire a metaphysical dimension and take the reader beyond the gambit of life and death, and beyond the dichotomy of noun and verb. The poet questions if it is possible for a soul to "crawl away" or die silently on this planet when in its flesh and blood it had clung beyond English. The poem ends with a self-obituary that emphasizes an action and a purpose beyond life. Shahid Ali continues his *jung* that is beyond "English." By developing and showcasing three theoretical models in this project, I have tried to go beyond English and Eurocentric comparative literature that is evolving into global studies. I have attempted to showcase this by examining how translations and originals are beyond the strict boundaries of life and death, and presence and absence.

Unlike the recent book of Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, my project shows translatability and untranslatability as intricately woven into each other, locally and globally. They cannot be read in isolation. Rabindranath Tagore's English *Gitanjali*'s translatability is championed and constrained by Tagore's influential early admirers Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats. Translatability emerges, in case of Tagore, as a political and creative act that brings a new poetic form,

the prose-poem, into Bengali, delineates Tagore's ideas on translation "vishwa sahitya" or "world literature," moving Tagore via the intermediary of English into world markets marked by colonial rule, including Argentina, Mexico, and Chile in the global south. In the case of Gabriela Mistral and Mahadevi Varma, translatability and untranslatability emerge as a relational category, visible in the evolving translational history of the poems of Gabriela Mistral and Mahadevi Varma in English, demanding the reader to be as sensitive toward the target language as to the source language. The case of James Joyce reveals that a close analysis of translatability and untranslatability expose the role literary works, especially novels, play in the production and reproduction of the discourse of globalization with a cultural difference. A complex web of connection and dissociation provides a rich comparative source for studying different kinds of translatability and untranslatability in the global south.

Indeed, methodologically, "translatability" and "untranslatability" are effective comparative tools to showcase a global comparative literature, not only with literary texts but also in literary theory, locally and globally. A linguistically informed and literarily conscious turn to translation, translatability, and untranslatability can inaugurate a journey for global English studies that needs to be more "comparative" in theory and practice.

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