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**CARTOGRAPHIES OF ENGAGEMENT: THE PARALLELS AND
INTERSECTIONS OF LATIN AMERICAN AND SOUTH ASIAN
LITERATURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

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“Cartographies of Engagement: The Parallels and Intersections of Latin American and South Asian Authors,” establishes comparisons between Latin American authors who lived in South Asia and their South Asian contemporaries from 1906 to the present. Working in South Asian literatures in English, Hindi and Urdu, and Latin American literature in Spanish, this project recovers a century-long literary exchange between two previously unassociated regions and suggests a shared trajectory of professionalization for authors in the Global South. In the first half of the twentieth century, authors from both regions traveled abroad as a means of supporting themselves – whether through cultural exchanges, diplomatic postings, or in visiting positions with foreign universities. I suggest that their growing commitment to transnational solidarity was not a precondition for these travels, but the product of them. In the second half of the century, authors from both regions experienced a radical shift as their writing gained cache in the global north. I therefore conclude by demonstrating the connections between the emergence of Latin American Boom literature and its translation into English in the 1960s, its influence on the subsequent generation of South Asian Anglophone writers, and their own emergence as a global phenomenon beginning in the 1980s with *Midnight’s Children*.

In bringing together two world areas that are rarely associated, it reveals a paradox in contemporary methods of comparative literary scholarship: even as disciplines expand to accommodate an ever greater diversity of language traditions, the frameworks for comparing those traditions remain remarkably narrow. In mapping the circulation of authors and texts around the globe, literary scholars have typically relied on just two different types of what I call “literary cartographies.” First, “cartographies of domination,” describe historical relations of power, as elaborated in postcolonial and decolonial theories. Second, “cartographies of contiguity,” describe relations based on physical proximity and historical routes of exchange, such as area studies designations or the more recent “oceanic turn.” By contrast, this project carves out methodological space for “cartographies of engagement,” which highlight the routes of authors and texts that contravene larger patterns of political domination and economic exchange.

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Introduction: On Literary Cartography

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation elaborates a “Cartography of Engagement” created by a cohort of Latin American authors who lived in South Asia and the parallel movements of their South Asian contemporaries from 1906 to the present. In doing so it recovers the untold history of a century of literary exchange between two historically unrelated world areas, and suggests a shared trajectory of professionalization for authors in the global south.

In the first half of the twentieth century, these exchanges happened at the level of individual authors whose unusual itineraries brought them into contact with people on the other side of the world. Authors from both regions traveled abroad as a means of supporting themselves and building transnational connection – whether in diplomatic or military service, as delegates of cultural diplomacy, or in visiting positions with foreign universities. Retracing these authors’ foreign sojourns demonstrates that their growing commitment to transnational solidarity was not a precondition for such travels, but the product of them. In the second half of the twentieth century, changes in geopolitical relations, in the publishing industry, and in allied cultural fields created a new landscape for cultural production from the global periphery. As first Latin American and then South Asian writing gained international prestige and circulation, it became increasingly possible to facilitate significant intellectual exchange between these two literary bodies without the direct contact of individual travelers. I therefore conclude by demonstrating the connections between the emergence of Latin American Boom literature as a transnational market phenomenon in the 1960s, its influence on the subsequent generation of South Asian Anglophone writers, and their own emergence as a global trend beginning in the 1980s.

In order to create this set of comparisons between Latin American and South Asian literatures, it has been necessary to interrogate assumptions about cartography that undergird much of contemporary literary study. This introduction suggests how

cartography came to be such an important part of Comparative Literature, and why the project that follows troubles some of its most prominent maps.

WHAT IS LITERARY CARTOGRAPHY?

The geometry of the world – a near-perfect sphere with a single core and infinite, equidistant peripheries dotting its surface – is very much at odds with the way that literature circulates around that surface. Literary Cartography, then, designates any attempt to establish a map that can illustrate how the circulation of authors, ideas and texts actually works. As a byproduct, these maps also suggest the “grounds” upon which different kinds of literature can be compared, such that almost any comparative project must ally itself with a literary cartography in order to proceed. The phenomenon of Literary Cartography deserves closer inquiry because the kind of maps that we create as literary scholars not only organize, but ultimately naturalize certain types of comparative inquiry while precluding others.

Although we might define several styles of Literary Cartography operative in scholarship today, this project is particularly invested in mapmaking exercises that fall into two broadly-defined types: *Cartographies of Domination*, and *Cartographies of Contiguity*. Cartographies of Domination refers to those literary maps drawn along the grain of historical relations of violence, most obviously European colonialism. These maps make it possible to read literatures of the former colonies in tandem with that of their erstwhile colonizers, though they can also be called upon to draw together literatures in disparate areas based on their shared experience of dominating or being dominated. Most common among Cartographies of Domination are the scholarly constellations around Postcolonial and Decolonial theories, which become problematic for this project in their tendency to isolate South Asian and Latin American experiences into their discrete frameworks. Cartographies of Contiguity, on the other hand, assert comparability based on the movements of people and ideas through a bounded geographic area, attached to areas of purportedly shared cultural, economic or political exchange. Area Studies is, of course, a classic example of Cartographies of Contiguity, but so are more recently popularized “oceanic turn” – Hemispheric, Trans-Atlantic, Trans-Pacific, Circum-Mediterranean, Circum-Caribbean, and Circum-Indian Ocean zones, etc.

Of course, literary study has also innovated strategies for associating geographically distant authors and texts that do not depend on spatial logics. Among these, the ideas of Relationality and Minor Literatures have been especially influential on the project at hand. In associating two heretofore unrelated regions, I am inspired by Marc Caplan's *How Strange the Change*, which justifies comparisons between Yiddish and West African literatures based on parallel minoritized positions and experiences of modernity. From Shumei Shih and Francoise Lionnet, I am inspired by the impetus behind *Minor Transnationalism* to turn away from studying the relationship between the center and the margin and instead to "examine the relationships among different margins."¹

Moreover, in their adaptation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, Shih and Lionnet suggest a powerful metaphor for transnational literary connection that works counter to the logic of Cartographies of Domination and Contiguity. The concept of the rhizome suggests a single subterranean root with several, unpredictably emergent and seemingly unconnected surface manifestations. While this model is useful for illuminating the underlying economic and political conditions that unite authors in two different world peripheries, the model of mapmaking is perhaps more appropriate to a project that is fundamentally concerned with the circulatory routes of authors and texts on the terrestrial surface. Moreover, a continued attention to movements through space reflects the importance given to specificity of place and the experience of movement by these authors themselves. We might think, for example, of the impact of confinement on the writings of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Pablo Neruda in Chapter one, the role of nomadism in the alternative identities imagined by Augusto d'Halmar and Miraji in Chapter two, or the hyper-literal attention to spatial detail in the sojourner writing discussed in Chapter four.

That is why this project proposes an alternative literary cartography, Cartography of Engagement, rather than an alternative to literary cartography itself. Rather than Deleuze and Guattari, then, Michel de Certeau's concepts of movements as inscription may be a productive place to begin. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau contrasts his notion of strategic vision, which seeks to encompass and thus control a space in its totality, with the more limited, but more creative tactical vision of the individuals who create their own paths

¹ Françoise Lionnet and Shumei Shih, *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.

on the ground. This perspective, de Certeau writes, “assumes users make ... innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules.”² In “Walking in the City,” de Certeau concretized these relations in movement through space. While the all-seeing, aloof “urbanist, the city planner or cartographer,” seeks a totalizing view of the city from above, the tactical actor carves a route through the city, a route that often contradicts the intentions set by planners.³ If we think of contemporary transnational models for literary study as having a “strategic” vision of the circulation of culture around the world, then it is important to recall that many authors and artists who actually participated in that circulation did so not according to the well-worn grooves of trade routes and political expansion, but along more jagged contours of their own design. We might therefore conceive of this project as following the unexpected routes carved out by Latin American and South Asian authors in contradistinction to the best-laid plans of literary cartographers.

In attempting to describe the significance of these routes, let us take as exemplary Octavio Paz’s idiosyncratic journey through the Rajasthani temple complex Galta-ji, recorded in the extended essay *El mono gramático* [*The monkey grammarian*]. I first encountered Galta-ji while studying Hindi in Jaipur in 2010. It was the end of the line for the bus route that ran past my house, and one of the only areas of touristic interest that did not charge an entry fee. Unlike Paz, I entered Galta-ji from the Jaipur side, climbing up a steep hill to the Surya temple. From that point, one can look down, cartographer-like, on the sprawl of modern Jaipur, but the rest of the temple complex lies in the valley below, hidden from view. That further complex is dedicated to Hanuman, the monkey god of the Ramayana and the grammarian of Paz’s title. In his honor, the temple has cultivated a sizeable and aggressive population of macaques, and these, rather than the impressive architecture or topography, are what make it famous. Like me, and like millions of pilgrims, Paz began by

² Michel Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), xiv.

³ Ibid, 93. In chapter four, I pick up on the question of whether or not the positions of strategic and tactical are uniform and ontologically given, and how de Certeau’s model might account (or fail to account) for differences among so-called “tactical actors.” For more on this important question, see Fiske (1989), Buchanan (1997), Bennet (1998), and a synthesis of their positions offered by Mike Crang. Mike Crang, “Relics, Places and Unwritten Geographies in the Work of Michel De Certeau (1925-86),” in *Thinking Space*, ed. by Mike Crang and N. J. Thrift (London: Routledge, 2000), 149.

following the prescribed path through the Hanuman complex, past the pools where young macaques swim to escape the blistering desert heat, and up to the Surya temple overlooking the city. Somewhere along the way, however, he wanders off. *El mono gramático*, instead of tracing a linear journey, performs its own meandering, its inability to move clearly from A to B. The beauty of the book lies in Paz's dual refusal either to move through space in the prescribed manner, or to give up the spatial logic of his piece in favor of a purely deterritorialized reflection. Following Paz, this project insists that movement through space is still an important component of intellectual production, but resists itineraries pre-ordained from above.

ROUTES OVER TERRITORIES: WHAT IS CARTOGRAPHY OF ENGAGEMENT?

This project proposes an alternative kind of cartographic thinking: A Cartography of Engagement. Engagement here operates at three levels: **I.** valuing individual authors or texts "engagement" with unpredicted routes, operating counter to larger models of circulation; **II.** recognizing individual authors "engagement" with other cultures, and seeking to understand the complex ethical dimensionality of those interactions; **III.** encouraging scholarly "engagement" with the criteria by which certain objects of study become comparable, rather than understanding those criteria to be natural or pre-given.

Existing Literary Cartographies remain vital because of the way they allow literary scholars to talk about the comparable material conditions under which certain literatures are produced and circulated. Cartography of Engagement seeks to maintain attention to these features while acknowledging that even when a set of relations does not follow established cartographic logics based on other kinds of large-scale social interactions over space, it may still be driven by another kind of logic deserving of systematic elaboration. It likewise de-naturalizes the logics that justify established literary cartographies, acknowledging that those maps are constructed with a certain degree of arbitrariness.

In her critique of the spatialized metaphor of global "flow," Marie Louise Pratt suggests the necessity of a more agent-focused, less naturalizing discourse to describe transnational movement. Flow, she writes, "suggests a natural process by which gravity will automatically reach a horizontal equilibrium... Like gravity, whatever effects it produces are

by definition the effects that it was supposed to produce. They cannot be questioned”⁴ For Pratt, this metaphor artificially naturalizes the way that of goods, ideas and people move around the world, eliminating the influence of individual decisions and foreclosing an examination of the ethics of those choices.⁵ I argue that existing literary cartographies likewise seek to naturalize the comparisons they underwrite, and likewise foreclose more complex conversations about how and why literary objects become comparable. Foregrounding engagement as an active choice seeks to redress these issues.

This project makes the case for a particular engagement: the parallels and intersections between Latin American and South Asian authors and texts over the course of the twentieth century. These two regions, briefly associated by Columbus’ misrecognition of the Americas as India in 1492, have remained largely unconnected since. Then, at the turn of the twentieth century, the unexpected journeys of set of Latin American authors began to draw them back together. At first these connections were atomized and haphazard, but as the century wore on, they became more concerted and more significant. The present project theorizes these early contacts and points of comparison as a precursor to the current moment in which literature flows between the two regions through Anglophone transnational publishing networks. Within this set of journeys, authors and texts meandered across territories that existing cartographic logics would strain to keep separate: they straddled identities of dominator and dominated, worldly and regional, and wandered into various Areas without following the logics of designated “trans” or “circum” zones.

A Cartography of Engagement, then, is a kind of mapmaking that traces routes rather than territories. If existing cartographic logics seek to define a “comparison territory,” a broad area in which all comparisons are deemed equally possible, then

⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes : Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 262.

⁵ In the introduction to *TransLatin Joyce*, Brian L. Price, César A. Salgado and John Pedro Schwartz, on the other hand, suggest that aquatic metaphors, particularly the “wave theory” of quantum mechanics, may be a very effective way to describe the unexpected and often uneven distribution of literary influence as it spreads across the globe. “Rather than a on-time dissemination [...] a flow of modern and antimodern energies with no single epicenter but emanating simultaneously from a line of submerged, often unknown, faults, both central and peripheral.” Brian L. Price, César A. Salgado and John Pedro Schwartz, eds. *TransLatin Joyce: Global Transmissions in Ibero-American Literature*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), xiv-xv.

Cartography of Engagement begins by identifying a path *through* such areas that can function either as a mode of bridging two points (Intersections, like those explored in Chapters 3, 4 and 5) or a strategy of movement itself (Parallels, like those explored in Chapters 1 and 2).

A focus on engagement may provide a way out of the impasse that has seemed to plague Cartographies of Domination since the inception of postcolonial studies. Even among postcolonial theorists who disagree with one another on every other point, there is a general agreement that the field as constructed is too broad to be theoretically coherent. Most of these theorists agree that while we may understand the impacts of colonialism in a single case with some degree of historical specificity, the abstraction necessary to make these cases comparable *to all other formerly colonized territories* obscures more than it reveals. Over the past three decades, the common reaction to this conundrum was simply to narrow the territory understood to be “postcolonial”, without addressing the underlying conceptual problem of the “comparison territory” as a model.

Practically speaking, this strategy has generally resulted in the jettisoning of Latin America from the privileged analytical territory of postcoloniality. Various justifications were offered. Temporally, Latin American colonialism and postcolonialism are simply too early (McClintock, Gabilondo), or fail to track against historical markers like industrialization and modern capitalism that make French and British imperialism different from earlier colonial forms (Loomba).⁶ Demographically, Latin American colonialism did not precisely follow the settler model or the resource exploitation model, but ends up somewhere in between, while Latin American postcolonial nation formations were impacted by very different issues of linguistic and cultural diversity than present in Asian and African territories (Klor de Alva, Mignolo).⁷ Whatever the reason offered, the result is the same. Postcolonial scholars by and large exempt themselves from attending to Latin America in the development or application of their theories.

⁶ Joseba Gabilondo, cited in Claire Taylor, “Latin America,” in *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. John McLeod (London: Routledge, 2007), 166. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 10-12. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/postcolonialism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 8-10.

⁷ Jorge Klor de Alva and Walter Mignolo, cited in Taylor, “Latin America,” 165-166.

As Fernando Coronil has illustrated, the pervasive attempt to marginalize Latin America within this conceptual map, both as a region with a shared history of oppression, and as an academic area worthy of contributing to debates about the field, precipitated the development an alternative Cartography of Domination: Decolonial theory.⁸ While postcolonial theories tend to develop out of historical cases from the British Empire, this constellation of theories begins to distinguish itself by taking Latin America as the paradigmatic example. Rather than simply changing the coordinates of the “comparison territory,” decolonial theories gestures at dismantling cartographic logics of comparison by highlighting the presence of different kinds of actors within the *same* territory. In these theories, elites in the colonies are allied with those in the European center, while pockets of “coloniality” pop up even within dominant territories. The ability to distinguish these various groups outside of territorial logics is a step toward more coherent comparison. Yet excluding certain actors from these territories also ignores the way that relations of domination impinge upon the lives of *all* people in a certain physical location, even elites. At the same time, movements *through* territory also produce changes in status, even for a single individual: d’Halmar and Neruda are understood as “European” in India, but “Chilean” in Europe; Faiz Ahmed Faiz transforms from a religious minority to part of the majority simply by staying in place during Partition. Finally, once these archipelagos of oppression are established, they begin to function like any other “comparison territory,” flattening specificity for the sake of comparison.⁹

As Sangeeta Ray emphasizes, South Asia has long enjoyed pride of place within postcolonial studies.¹⁰ Its history is offered as the paradigmatic example, while South

⁸ Fernando Coronil, “Latin American Postcolonial Studies and Global Decolonialization,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁹ In representing this project publically, I have taken recourse to the descriptor “South-South” or “Global South” which, like postcolonial and decolonial, also effectively describes a Cartography of Domination. While the term “South-South connection” is a useful heuristic for describing the exchange between authors of these two regions, this project itself uses a comparative perspective to emphasize how Latin American and South Asian writers were shaped by a degree of access to the rest of the world that was unequal not only with reference to European and American counterparts, but also with regard to one another.

¹⁰ Sangeeta Ray, “Imagining Otherwise: Comparative South Asian Literatures and the MLA” *Comparative Literature Studies* 50, 2 (2013): 236.

Asianist scholars are perceived to have the loudest voices within the postcolonial conversation. Latin America, discussed above, has likewise become the paradigmatic example and disciplinary homeland of decolonial theories. In writing across these two geographic areas, therefore, the current project also presents a challenge to the institutional divide that has grown up between them in the last decade of scholarship.

Cartographies of Contiguity, on the other hand, have largely sidestepped this issue of internal coherence, even though they seem to set up the same kind of “comparison territories” with their attendant methodological problems. This is in part because projects under these rubrics tend to focus on specific, concrete exchanges of people and cultural goods. Cartography here is used to explain where and how those exchanges happened, but it is the circulation itself, rather than territory, that methodologically justifies comparison. Of course, this focus on routes is exactly what is prescribed in the Cartography of Engagement model advocated here. The difference is that Cartographies of Contiguity understand their routes to preexist the particular projects in which they are described. Routes are naturalized and ossified to the degree that they follow other kinds of cartographic logic, be it basic physical proximity, historical lines of economic exchange, or routes of mass immigration. Whereas the comparison territory for Cartographies of Domination is too broad, suggesting untenable connections, Cartographies of Contiguity are actually too narrow, excluding a host of possible routes because they do not follow these naturalizing logics.¹¹

The naturalization of various literary cartographies may appeal because it seems to justify the permanent establishment of “comparison territories” as part of academic disciplines. These territories, again, are ones in which any possible future comparison is already substantially supported by a shared methodology. Yet ultimately these methodologies crumble under the weight of the territories and the infinitely proliferating possible comparisons they are meant to support. Even so, these logics remain so powerful that Comparative Literature’s public attempts to imagine its own futurity in fact revert to one or another of these existing models. In her much-cited essay on “Planetarity,” for

¹¹ Most recently, Digital Humanities projects have become invested in gathering large amounts of data about the circulation of books and authors over the globe. Again, the risk of models created in this way is their ability to naturalize certain forms of circulation and discount their alternatives.

instance, when Gayatri Spivak offers an example of how Comparative Literature might evolve, she describes the movement of people and texts through a trans-Pacific zone.¹² Amir Mufti's recent essay "Global Comparativism," likewise, imagines that future as one where vernacular Asian language literatures are compared to those of their former colonizers.¹³ These "futures," of course, are already institutionalized in existing Cartographies of Contiguity and Cartographies of Domination, respectively. Cartographies of Engagement suggests that the only way out of this impasse is to move away from a reliance on a particular "comparison territory" or cartographic logic to justify a given comparative project.

EAST OF THE SUN AND WEST OF THE MOON: LOCATING THE ETHICS OF "ENGAGEMENT"

I was originally inspired to write this dissertation by the discovery of a small cohort of Latin American authors who had lived for months and even years in South Asia. In my attempt to describe the kind of writing that emerged from these sojourns, I was drawn to debates in a burgeoning scholarly field called "Latin American Orientalism." As I discuss at greater length the end of chapter three, this field is philosophically divided over the question whether the sometimes stereotypical representations of Asia and the Middle East in Latin American writing can be termed "Orientalist" absent the material relations of domination that undergird Said's original concept. Although this question is marshaled primarily in relation to particular texts and defended or opposed based on close readings of those texts, at heart the question is not aesthetic but ontological: what is the nature of Latin Americans themselves as political actors? Either Latin Americans as a group exist in a vertical relationship to Asians and thus all of their representations of Asia are suspect; or they exist in a horizontal relationship with Asians and thus their representations are acceptable. Of course, in reality, the relationship between those groups is neither fully vertical nor horizontal, but more properly diagonal. As I discuss at greater length in chapter four, binary theories like Orientalism are ill-equipped to address their complex positionality. Since transnational encounters between these groups have become

¹² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 116-117.

¹³ Aamir Mufti. "Global Comparativism," *Critical Inquiry* 31.2 (2005): 488.

increasingly common over the course of the last century, it is ever more urgent that scholars adopt new critical categories that can precisely describe their shifting relations.

More generally, I have been dissatisfied with the scholarly tendency to over-determine the intentions and ethics of transnational sojourners based on the relations of the nations from which they hail. The growth of Orientalism as a theoretical paradigm (both in Latin American Studies and more generally in the humanities) has opened several new avenues of research, but too often it forecloses the possibility of solidarity between various parts of the world. Indeed, as Neil Lazarus writes in *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, much scholarship on postcolonial literature – here including both regions of interest the present study – have become overwhelmed with suspicion about the nature of representation itself. As of the 1990s, he writes, critiques of specifically Eurocentric styles of representation were being “subsumed by a critique of representation itself as Eurocentric.”¹⁴ In the case of most of the authors in this study, their entire careers were marked by a commitment to internationalism and South-South solidarity, often as a direct consequence of journeys abroad. Studies that paint all written traces of those journeys with the broad brush of Orientalism overlook these impulses. In the process, they risk becoming just as reductive as the tropes they seek to diagnose.

This is particularly true of scholars like Silvia Molloy and Mario Siskind, who insist that Latin American writing about Asia is always already over-determined by European models. In such accounts, sojourner impressions of South Asia, even when they originate in extended first-hand experience, are reframed so that they can never exceed what French and English Orientalist authors have already written. Either Latin American sojourners are unselfconsciously reiterating European tropes – as Molloy claims regarding d’Halmar and Hernán Loyola claims regarding Neruda – or they are consciously replicating them to gain acceptance with a European audience – as Siskind argues regarding *modernista* authors.¹⁵ The possibility that Latin American sojourners may have an entirely different perspective from European colonialists is never seriously considered. As I argue more thoroughly in

¹⁴ Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 127.

¹⁵ Mariano Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 223-261; Silvia Molloy, “Of Queens and Castanets: Hispanidad, Orientalism and Sexual Difference,” in *Queer Diasporas*, ed. Cindy Patton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Hernán Loyola, “Las Dos Residencias,” in *Residencia en la tierra* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1987).

chapter three, this perspective *itself* replicates the logic of Orientalism, a fact that goes unrecognized in the study of Latin American travels abroad. In chapter five I go on to demonstrate how a similarly Eurocentric perspective has distorted scholarly interpretations of contemporary South Asian Anglophone fiction. Again, these authors are either un-self-consciously replicating tropes of a “Raj Revival,” or, at best, they do so with a knowing wink.¹⁶ By insisting that South Asian authors are unprecedentedly focused on market success in Europe and the United States, many contemporary critics foreclose the possibility of exploring wider network of influences and interlocutors for these highly transnational texts.

More importantly for the framing of this project, such perspectives artificially narrow ideas of what worldliness was and could be for authors in these two regions. We should recall that early Latin American sojourners who inspired this project – d’Halmar, Neruda and Paz – came to South Asia completely by accident, as functionaries in the diplomatic corps. All of them became diplomats out of a combined need for financial security and a hope that international service would lift them out of what they considered a cultural backwater in Latin America and take them to the center of the literary world in Europe. Certainly none of them intended to end up in another backwater on the other side of the globe. Yet in all three cases that sojourn in Asia precipitated tremendous developments in their literature and politics, including the opportunity to develop *different* concept of worldliness than the one either they or their critics initially imagined.

Here again we see the essential role of the material conditions illuminated by literary cartography. It was the *inability* of early authors to fully professionalize, the *unequal* access they had to the geographic center of literary capital in Europe, and the very *limits* imposed on them by repressive geopolitical conditions that produced unexpected avenues for political solidarity and artistic growth. Understanding these travels as a product of what Siskind calls “*deseo del mundo*,” “Cosmopolitan Desire” – a desire of Latin American authors to lay claim to and participate in the field of “universal literature” centered on Europe –

¹⁶ See, for example, Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001); Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Mrinalini Chakravorty, *In Stereotype: South Asia in the Global Literary Imaginary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

traps these authors in the ideological origins of their journeys abroad.¹⁷ By instead framing engagement with other parts of the world following Leela Gandhi's concept of "Affective cosmopolitanism" – "the ethico-political practice of a desiring self inexorably drawn toward difference" – we can better acknowledge the ethical position in which these authors found themselves *as the result of* their travels.¹⁸ In Siskind's framework, cosmopolitanism merely brings Latin American cultural production into the "universal" European orbit. Through Gandhi's framework, however, cosmopolitanism paves the way for connections among peripheries, or between dissenting members of the center and their allies in the periphery.

Gandhi's analysis is also guides us to be more generous toward certain understandings of cultural others displayed by these authors that, decades or even a century later, seem out of step with contemporary values. Whether Paz and Neruda's distinct but complementary obsessions with "Eastern" sexuality, Sarduy's Lacanian treatment of Buddhism, Faiz's prudish reading of Cuban culture, or Ghose's retread of Latin American exoticism, none of these "engagements" has aged particularly well. Yet behind most of them is an ardent desire for solidarity the seriousness of which should not be totally undercut by the relative silliness of their presentation. Moreover, in honor the original misrecognition that conceptually unites these two world areas, this project seeks to push back against the unrealistic demand of "perfect understanding" in cross cultural encounters and, instead, make space for a celebration of what we might term "productive misunderstanding."

LET'S GET ENGAGED: COMPARISON AS TACTICS

Mirroring the active choice to embrace new forms of affiliation on the part of the authors in this study, let us think about the third dimension of "engagement" as our own

¹⁷ Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires*, 3.

¹⁸ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006), 17. Along this line of thought we might also draw upon Shameem Black's *Fiction Across Borders* or Deepika Bahri's *Native Intelligence*, both of which offer similarly recuperative readings of novels by elite postcolonial authors about non-elite others within their own cultures of origin. As we shall see in chapter five, even when South Asian and Latin American authors write about their own cultures rather than each other's, they are not invulnerable from scholarly accusations of bad faith based on a fundamental suspicion of representation. Shameem Black, *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late-twentieth-century Novels* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Deepika Bahri, *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2003.

recourse to comparison as a mode of study. The insistence that comparative diads be based on natural or pre-ordained similarities furthers what Natalie Melas has called “The Fetish of Equivalence.” If our recourse to comparison is only to argue for the equality of different literary phenomena around the world (and thus justify their inclusion within existing models of the canon), this methodology reinforces the strategy of the status quo. When we instead highlight our own engagement in choosing the criteria by which patently *unequal* literary phenomena become comparable, where, as Melas puts it the “grounds for comparison” can be decoupled from a need for equivalence or commensurability between objects of study, we tactically disrupt this order.¹⁹

Thus, although the project is united by the overarching comparison of Latin American and South Asian writings, both sections (and often successive chapters) articulate different rationales for associating the authors and texts they contain. In building and justifying these associations, I have again been influenced by Octavio Paz, although in this case, I take my cue at a remove from his own words. Paz’s final book about South Asia, *Vislumbres de la India*, could be literally translated as “glimmers” or “glimpses” of India, highlighting consciously fragmented nature of the sojourner’s perspective on the subcontinent (discussed further in chapter four). However, the standard English translation for this piece is *In the Light of India*, which refocuses readerly attention on how Paz’s perspective *on all things* has changed as a result of his time in South Asia. While it is a stretch to call this title change a mistranslation, I think it does pave the way for a productive misunderstanding.²⁰ When juxtapose these authors’ literary and political engagements so

¹⁹ Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World : Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 42. Melas makes a compelling association between equivalence/commensurability of literary objects from different parts of the world and the global flow of capital. This association, of course, is echoed by many critics of World or Postcolonial literatures, as they register anxiety about the growing imbrication of our object of study (and our institutional home) with the same economic system. I explore these anxieties more fully in chapter five.

²⁰ We might think here of Emily Apter’s call for “engagement with the world’s languages” and her interest in the productive value of various forms of mistranslation. We might also think of this project as being opposed to what Valishini Cooppan calls the “(dis)engagement” from non-western literature “in which other literatures and cultures are recognized, even valorized, in order that their existence in some temporal anteriority or spatial exteriority may rehabilitate, shore up, and, to use a popular term, globalize the privileged narratives of the West.” Emily S. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London ; New York: Verso, 2013), 4; Valishini Cooppan, cited in Apter, *Against World Literature*, 326.

that they can be read *in the light of* one another, we illuminate something quite different from what we would see if we examined them on their own. Much more importantly for this particular project, when we become actively engaged in the methodologies by which our subjects are deemed comparable, we illuminate something quite different about the methodologies through which they have been traditionally approached.

CONTENTS

Part I: Parallels

By tracing a parallel around the map, we can infer the way that a constant factor – distance from the equator – creates broadly shared conditions in otherwise distinct locations. Likewise, the first section of the dissertation asserts the comparability of two pairs of Latin American and South Asian authors based on their parallel physical, ideological and aesthetic journeys in the first half of the twentieth century. The concept of parallelism allows us to compare authors who never intersected, or met only briefly, but whose challenges and strategies for facing them were strikingly similar. Like the Shih and Lionnet's invocation of the rhizome, the idea of the cartographic parallel directs our attention to the consistent effects of peripherality as they arise in non-contiguous global locations. At the same time, it also modifies or contradicts certain methodologies that have grown up within one or another Cartography of Domination for explaining how those effects should be understood.

I. "My Heart, My Fellow Traveler": Webs of Engagement and the Itineraries of Faiz Ahmed Faiz

This chapter is inspired by a chance meeting: One night in 1962, the renowned Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz found himself in an impromptu transnational poetry recitation with the Chilean poet and future Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda. Both men were in town because of the Lenin prize, fellow travelers in the political, as well as the literal sense of the word. Although neither man spoke the language in which the other composed, according to witnesses, they seemed to understand each other's poetry perfectly. In the piece that follows, I trace moments like these as "joints" in a web of transnational institutions through which Faiz moved over the course of his life. At different times, this

web of affiliation offered *support*, both material and ideological, for authors like Faiz practice their art. It also offered *connection* to other parts of the world, even when those connections were not the ones they initially anticipated or desired. Yet these webs also threatened *entanglement*, physically or ideologically delimiting where these poets could go, or even putting them behind bars. In particular, I look at two other moments when Faiz's decades-long commitment to socialism created the opportunity for an unexpected connection with Latin America.

Just over a decade before this meeting, Faiz and Neruda had both found themselves under threat of politically imprisonment when their home governments suddenly aligned with the United States. Neruda was forced into hiding for a year after defying the "*Ley de la defensa permanente de la democracia*" [Law for the Permanent Defense of Democracy], which outlawed Communist affiliation in Chile. Faiz was imprisoned for four years for his role in the so-called "Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case." Just over a decade after his meeting with Neruda, Faiz was called upon to dust off his apparently preternatural abilities in Spanish, this time for a two-week invited tour of post-revolutionary Cuba. In highlighting the parallels between Faiz and Neruda's experiences in the first half of this chapter, I illuminate the way that authors from different parts of the global south shared the impact of larger geopolitical conditions during the Cold War and how – as in the anecdote above – they used poetry to respond creatively to those conditions. In the second half of the article, I turn to a moment in which Faiz addressed those shared conditions more directly in a different style of writing: the *safarnāmāh* or travelogue. Unlike the "perfect understanding" of his exchange with Neruda, the *safarnāmāh* exemplifies both the practical limits and the productive misunderstandings that emerged from Faiz's desire for socialist internationalism, cross-cultural understanding, and South-South solidarity.

II. Trans-migrations: A Chilean Novelist, an Indian Poet, and Transcending the Limits of Queer Regionalism

Whereas Faiz and Neruda's transnational connections were the result of their public, political identities, chapter two establishes a parallel between two authors for which cross-cultural encounters had a much more personal significance. This chapter explores the impact of the South Asian sojourn on the idea of transformation in the writing of Chilean novelist Augusto d'Halmar, juxtaposing him with a South Asian poet, Miraji, for whom

similar transformations, illnesses, and altered states were a primary aesthetic concern. In doing so, it brings out features of both authors' work that have been ignored or undervalued in their recent rehabilitation within the Euro-American academy as "queer" authors.

Chapter two examines three types of literary and bodily experimentation that link d'Halmar and Miraji together under the rubric of "trans". Their lives and writing reveal two contradictory impulses: the desire, on the one hand, to build a non-reproductive, cross-cultural lineage for themselves and their art, and on the other, to dissolve any sense of an autonomous selfhood and disappear. Each man indulges these seemingly incompatible desires through an idiosyncratic employment of the South Asian beliefs about reincarnation and renunciation, ones that combine mystical notions of movement between bodies and lives with more concrete experiments with naming, clothing and translation. Current Euro-American academic theories of queer regionalism and understandings of sexuality and gender presentation within former European colonies seem to foreclose this comparison. The chapter thus suggests Miraji and d'Halmar's trans practices can be alternatively understood through the writing of Cuban traveler to India, Severo Sarduy.

Part II: Intersections

Cartographic logic uses the point of intersection between a parallel and a meridian to define a given location on the map. This second section explores the points at which Latin American and South Asian peoples, literatures and theories come into direct contact, in an attempt to define or redefine the resulting position. Chapters three and four explore the consequences for Latin American literature and its scholarship as it encounters South Asia, while chapter five traces the flow of publishing in the opposite direction through an exploration of the transnational mechanisms that made it possible.

III. Chasing your (Josie) Bliss: The Troubling Critical Afterlife of Pablo Neruda's Burmese Lover

Since their encounter in 1928, Neruda and generations of scholars have filled reams with the description of his Burmese lover, Josie Bliss: exotic, passionate, animalistic and homicidally jealous. Behind them, however, lies an absolute void: We lack not just the archival evidence to corroborate this particular version of Josie, but the evidence to suggest

there was ever any Josie, at all. How is it, then, that our vision of Josie has remained so consistent in Latin American scholarship for the last 80 years?

Chapter three demonstrates that scholars' reticence to contradict Neruda's autobiographical writing, their general unfamiliarity with the Asian context, and their Derridean "archive fever," or the fetishistic faith in the potential of archival material to yield new insights, have combined to perpetuate a transparently Orientalist stereotype in the guise of historical fact. In the absence of more traditional archival sources, Neruda scholarship has turned to British and French Orientalist literature as the major source of "evidence" about Josie and her home. The chapter suggests how Josie's example illuminates current problems in the way Latin American Studies selectively adopts Said's concept of Orientalism to explain Latin American writing about Asia. Whereas Latin American scholarship has been primarily concerned with Orientalist tropes in individual texts, this chapter argues for the need to return to Said's original focus on Orientalism as an academic methodology. It sets up the stakes for the aesthetic examination of Latin American writing about South Asia presented in chapter four.

IV. Sojourners: The Shared Stylistics of Latin Americans Living in India

As explored in the previous chapter, what contemporary theories of "Latin American Orientalism" share is their use of the term "Orientalism" to describe the strategies Latin Americans use to represent Asian others. This chapter asks what *other* vocabularies we might use to describe the cultural products that emerge from encounters between Latin America and South Asia. After all, as we saw in the case of Faiz Ahmed Faiz in chapter one, even those ardently seeking solidarity do not emerge from cross-cultural encounters with "perfect understanding." Instead, they often misunderstand what they see, and equally often fail to realize what remains just out of sight. In an effort to move away from Orientalism as the only appropriate conceptual framework to describe these encounters, the following chapter explores shared tendencies across several Latin American authors in their descriptions of South Asian sojourns. It temporarily brackets the question of Orientalism in order to offer a surface reading of these surprisingly literal texts.

Focusing on the South Asian writing of Octavio Paz, Severo Sarduy, and Josefina Báez, this chapter their continuities with earlier forms of sojourner writing discussed in

other chapters (Augusto d'Halmar in chapter two, Pablo Neruda in chapter three). I draw on five books: Paz's previously mentioned essay *El mono gramático* and the book of poetry *Ladera este*, the final "Diario Indio" section from Sarduy's novel *Cobra*, Báez's first major performance piece *Dominicanish* and a later book of poetry *Cardamom and Other Spices*. The stylistic commonalities among the South-Asian writing of all three sojourners can be explained to a significant extent by their strategies for addressing the partial knowledge of their audiences with an equally partial form of citation. In the previous chapter I emphasize that generations of Neruda scholars read *Residencia en la tierra I* as esoteric and deterritorialized because they did not have the cultural resources to recognize the Asian territory it describes. Here I suggest that the shared sojourner practice of incomplete citation actually *encourages* this mis-reading of concrete, literal descriptions as fantastic, allusive, or abstract.

V. "Chronicle of a Boom Foretold: The Rise of South Asian Literature in Light of Latin America"

The poetry recitals at the opening of Chapter one marked a desire on the part of Latin American and South Asian poets for a future moment in which their literatures would regularly cross national and linguistic boundaries to produce lasting mutual influence. Chapter five suggests a history of the recent past in which that literary dream has come to pass, though not at all in the way those dreamers expected.

Since the 1990s, Anglophone South Asian fiction has been caught up in its own version of a predictable story: The Chronicle of a Boom Foretold. And yet scholars perusing this chronicle follow the line of their fate blissfully unaware that it has all been set out in advance. In this chapter, I show how the Latin American literary "Boom" of the 1960s and the current explosion of Anglophone South Asian fiction are actually products of the same set of agents in an increasingly transnational literary market. It has been fairly easy for scholars to recognize the intertextual traces of these circulations in the literature itself, but it has been surprisingly difficult for them to recognize confluences in the larger systems that make those exchanges possible. Even while authors themselves have explicitly referenced Latin American literature, scholars have generally written about the South Asian literary explosion as if it were happening in a vacuum, as if it were without historical precedent, as if

there were not a large, well developed and rigorously argued body of scholarship about the same phenomenon in Latin America.

This results in more than an innocent duplication of effort. It actually distorts our understanding of the engines that drive Boom phenomena in the transnational literary market. Reading across forty years of scholarship allows us to correct somewhat for the way academic trends direct attention to one or another Boom engine in a given period. But I am not merely or even primarily interested in understanding the “how” of Boom trends. As such, this chapter does not offer any single definitive answer to the question “what drives literary Booms.” Instead, my interest is captured by a curious fact: behind almost all of these theories about *how Booms work* is a much larger question about *why* they work. Why do writers produce certain kinds of narratives, and why do readers like them so much? Within these relatively innocent questions, moreover, lurk fraught issues of representation, exploitation, authenticity, political commitment and other categories through which contemporary literary scholars approach the ethics of their object. Getting a clearer hold on the Boom pattern itself thus allows us to see where certain actors have received undo blame, and others have escaped scrutiny altogether.

Each chapter is defined by a different kind of imaginary through which authors understand the nature of contact between their two regions. Chapter one recovers Faiz and Neruda’s dream of universal intelligibility, and the way that connection was mediated by the Soviet sphere of influence, which both facilitated and stymied it. Chapter two turns to authors’ imaginaries of dissenting sexual and gender identity and its potential to produce new forms of affiliation that cross otherwise intransigent regional borders. Chapter three addresses scholars’ troubling imaginaries of Asia and the way they have distorted the critical discourse about Latin American sojourns abroad, while chapter four explores the fantasies of authors themselves around the “psychic connection” between India and Latin America based on their shared (though disparate) experience of colonialism, exoticism, and othering. Finally, chapter five examines the contrast between earlier fantasies of universal intelligibility based on almost magical connections between individual authors of the global south, and the massive contemporary circulation of literature from both regions, a circulation whose particular conditions both fulfill and betray the dreams of those who came before.

“My Heart, My Fellow Traveler”: Webs of Engagement and the Itineraries of Faiz Ahmed Faiz

INTRODUCTION: PERFECT UNDERSTANDING



Figure 1: Faiz and Neruda in Sochi, “Faiz the Father.” *Dawn*, February 14, 2011.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/606166/920938>

This piece is inspired by a chance meeting: One night in 1962, the renowned Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz found himself in an impromptu transnational *mushaira*, or poetry recitation, with the Chilean poet and future Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda. According to a recollection of the event by Faiz’s daughters, “as the evening rolled on, [Faiz] and Neruda recited to one another. The translators did their bit and translated from Spanish into English and Urdu into English but as the night wore on both poets dispensed with the

translators. [Faiz] was reciting to Neruda in Urdu and he was reciting to [Faiz] in Spanish and I think both of them understood one another perfectly.”²¹

Versions of this scene, what we might call “speaking in tongues,” crop up again and again in the recollection of situations where writers of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds encounter one another. A meeting between Octavio Paz and S. H. Vatsyayan “Agyeya” in which the two played a version of “exquisite corpse” at a party in Delhi in 1985, produces a strikingly similar legend: “sheets of paper were passed out to the three of us... Our poem was composed according to the tradition of Hindi and Urdu poetry: a six-line stanza followed by a concluding couplet. The first line was written by me in Spanish; the second and third by Agyeya in Hindi.”²²

In the lore of World Literature, this exchange and others like it are taken to demonstrate two contradictory facets of each poet’s transnationalism—in the first place, that his artistic sensibilities allow him to recognize the value of poetic expression even in a language he cannot understand, and in the second, that the obvious poetic quality of his own utterance transcends the process of mere signification. The magic of these stories is that they can simultaneously reify the untranslatable poetic genius of individual languages, while suggesting that poetry composed in these diverse languages can become directly available to a transnational audience without the politically fraught mediation of translation. By extension, they posit that an artistic meeting of the minds can suspend or counteract the geopolitical arrangements that make certain languages “international” and others merely “regional.” In short, the popular retelling of this kind of interaction claims that such exchanges can take place on equal footing and neutral ground, without the mediation of the English language or the geopolitical power that brought it to prominence.

That is the fantasy version of literary exchange in the Global South. This chapter is about its reality. To say that these encounters are a fantasy, however, is not to dismiss them. The desire for a non-repressive, perfectly comprehensible encounter is both impossible and essential to the larger political projects of these authors. When we reground these encounters in their material conditions, it does not necessarily suggest the *failure* of

²¹ Salima Hashmi, Mozeena Hashmi, and Murtaza Razvi. “Faiz the Father,” *Dawn*, February 14, 2011. <http://www.dawn.com/news/606166/920938>.

²² Octavio Paz, *Vislumbres de la India* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1998), 29-30.

fantasies of perfect understanding but rather emphasizes the utility of productive misunderstanding to such projects. In fact, one of the larger claims of this project may be that a certain amount of misunderstanding may actually be an *essential* part of intercultural communication.

Let's return then, to the actual ground on which the two poets met: the now-famous resort town of Sochi, then part of Soviet Russia. Faiz had traveled there as a guest of the Soviet government, the recent recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize.²³ Although Faiz was careful to limit his official connection to Communism, he was certainly an ideological *humsafar*, or fellow traveler, and frequently a literal traveler within the Soviet sphere of influence.²⁴ Neruda, by that time a staunch communist, had been awarded the Lenin Prize nearly a decade earlier, and now had an open invitation to the proceedings.²⁵ In a sense, it is not as significant which poems Neruda and Faiz recited to each other on the fateful night in Sochi as it is how and why each of them interfaced with the ideology and institutional power of Soviet Communism that brought them there in the first place. In the piece that follows, I trace moments like these as the evidence of existing global networks, the joints of a web of transnational institutions through which Faiz moved over the course of his life, especially those which brought him into unexpected contact with Latin America.

I choose the term "web" for the way it conveys three essential elements of these networks: in the first instance, these webs offered *support*, both material and ideological, authors like Faiz to practice their art in an era before mass professionalization of authorship in the global south. In the second, they offered *connection* to other parts of the world, even, or especially when those connections were not the ones they initially anticipated or desired. In the third instance, however, webs threatened *entanglement*, physically or ideologically delimiting where these poets could go, or even putting them behind bars. The particular trajectory of Faiz's institutional involvement, described in the present chapter, is part of a larger pattern of South-Asian/ Latin American connection briefly outlined below.

²³ Hashmi, Mozeena Hashmi, and Murtaza Razvi, "Faiz the Father."

²⁴ Ludmila Vassilyeva, "Faiz Ahmed Faiz and the Soviet Union," in *Daybreak: Writings on Faiz*, ed. Yasmin Hamid (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁵ David Schidlowsky, *Neruda y su tiempo: las furias y las penas*, (Santiago de Chile: RIL Editores, 2008), 826.

We can begin to explore the ability of institutional affiliation to produce connection through reactions to the 1935 Congress for Cultural Freedom, what we might consider an event *par excellence* for promoting transnational artistic consciousness. Among South Asian writers, experiences at the 1935 Congress helped to inspire the 1936 formation of the All India Progressive Writers Association,²⁶ with which both Faiz and Agyeya had complex but important associations. Among Latin American writers, the 1937 Congress in Spain created the opportunity for new attachments among Latin American and Spanish authors based on their shared linguistic and cultural heritage, while also providing a brief ideological unity around resistance to Franco. In particular, it served as the initial meeting place for Neruda and Paz, who converged politically at this brief moment through their relationship to institutionalized resistance to Franco, only to diverge in a chiasmatic fashion in later engagements.²⁷ Although this moment precedes the opening of the Cold War, debates about ideologically committed or progressive writing – *comprometida* (Spanish); *tarqi pasand* (Urdu) *pragatishali* (Hindi) – and alignment of certain aesthetic priorities with that affiliation are already well underway at this time. Each poet’s perception of these artistic concerns, along with his ideological position, would shape his future institutional engagements.

A second moment in the 1940s and 1950s demonstrates the potential of affiliation to produce entanglement by exploring the parallel experiences of Faiz and Neruda as left-leaning artists in a moment of increasing Cold War paranoia. Through a close reading of the poetry each author wrote during a period of enforced confinement, the first section of this chapter suggest how these experiences impacted their artistic and political trajectories in similar ways. Finally, in 1960s and 70s, I suggest how authors like Faiz benefitted from institutional support their involvement of diplomacy, in both its governmental and cultural variants. The present chapter explores Faiz’s experience with cultural diplomacy through his 1973 journey to Cuba and the systems of institutional patronage that enabled it. We might consider this form of diplomacy in contrast to Paz’s experience in India in the mid-sixties, explored in chapter four.

²⁶ Carlo Coppola, “Urdu Poetry: The Progressive Episode” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1975), 99.

²⁷ Octavio Paz, *Itinerario* (Barcelona: Biblioteca de Bolsillo), 1994.

Institutions came to play these essential roles in the lives of poets like Faiz, I argue, in a moment just before Latin American and South Asian authors could reasonably expect to work as “professional” literary writers in the sense outlined by Ángel Rama in “El Boom en perspectiva.”²⁸ Rama argues that while earlier generations of Latin American authors would have approached writing as a supplement to their “day jobs,” as of the 1960s they were were finally able to “professionalize,” that is, to focus exclusively on writing and adjacent “cultural” work as a means of making ends meet.²⁹ Both authors and critics have tended to see the inability to access professional status as a detriment to the creative output of authors from the global south. Yet this chapter and the dissertation as a whole – suggests that these tactical maneuvers in fact produced the unexpected transnational connections that significantly impacted the creative trajectory of Faiz and other writers like him.

Within the larger contours of literary history outlined above, Faiz and Neruda’s lives often ran in parallel. In their youth, both men took “day jobs” that allowed them to sojourn abroad—Neruda in South Asia, South East Asia, and then Western Europe as a diplomat, Faiz in England and various parts of pre-independence India as a student, soldier and professor. The things they saw on those travels informed a profound ideological turn away from more traditional forms of love poetry in their respective language traditions and toward a more socially conscious style of writing. These transitions are encapsulated in Neruda’s 1936 poem “*Explico algunas cosas*” [I’m explaining a few things] and Faiz’s 1941 poem “*Mujh se pehlī sī mohabbat, merī mehbūb, nā māng*” [My love, do not ask me for that first love again]. In the late 40s and early 50s, both men’s politics put them under threat of imprisonment when their home governments suddenly aligned with the United States. Neruda was forced into hiding for a year after defying the “*Ley de la defensa permanente de la democracia*” [Law for the Permanent Defense of Democracy], which outlawed Communist affiliation in Chile. Faiz was imprisoned for four years for his role in the so-called “Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case.” Afterward, faced with political instability and not-infrequent

²⁸ John Guillory offers another account of the transition away from “patronage” and toward “professionalization” that occurred in Europe during the Enlightenment. However, access to support for literary endeavors was quite different in the (at that time) colonial locations from which Neruda and Faiz hail. Thus, I find Rama’s description and timeline more fitting for the project at hand. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 306.

²⁹ Ángel Rama. “El Boom en perspectiva.” *Signos Literarios* 1 enero-junio (2005): 193-208.

hostility to their ideological commitments, both poets spend significant time in the fifties and sixties living abroad. After returning in the 1970s, both became involved with left-leaning governments in their home countries – Neruda as a supporter of Salvador Allende, Faiz as a supporter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Right-wing coups in both countries dealt each poet a body blow. Neruda died shortly after Pinochet’s coup in 1973; Faiz went into exile in Lebanon after Mohammad Zia al Haq took power in 1977, and returned to Pakistan only during the last years of his life.

By highlighting the parallels between their experiences in the first half of this chapter, I wish to illuminate the way that authors from different parts of the global south shared the impact of larger geopolitical conditions during the Cold War and how – as in the anecdote above – they used poetry to respond creatively to those conditions. In the second half of the chapter, I turn to a moment in which Faiz addressed those shared conditions more directly in a different style of writing: the *safarnāmāh* or travelogue.

In the introduction, I offered de Certeau’s model of strategy versus tactics to establish a contrast between large-scale theoretical apparatus for associating literature of different regions and the individual routes taken by authors, routes that did not neatly fit into those larger “literary cartographies.” Here, we might also use de Certeau’s theory to understand the way that these authors interacted with transnational institutions, in this case the Soviet sphere of influence that associated Faiz with cultural production in Latin America. If we think of cultural diplomacy initiatives as having a “strategic” vision of the circulation of culture around the world, then it is important to recall that many authors and artists who actually participated in that circulation did so not according to the smooth lines envisioned by their sponsors, but along more jagged contours of their own design. Describing similar tactical maneuvers among Latin American authors in the U.S. sphere of influence, Deborah Cohn reminds us that they “had their own literary and political agendas, and... rightly viewed themselves as agents of their own cause rather than vehicles for transmitting official U.S. policy.”³⁰

To offer yet another politically inflected reading of Faiz’s work amplifies what had already become a well-worn cliché about him—that his distinctive contribution to Urdu

³⁰ Deborah N. Cohn, *The Latin American Literary Boom and U.S. Nationalism During the Cold War* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 32.

poetry was the ability to reinvigorate older styles and symbolic language and with the urgency of contemporary issues. Certain critics like Gopi Chand Narang go so far as to provide a key by which we may “decode” Faiz’s use of traditional *ghazal* vocabulary for specific progressive referents, eg: *ashiq* (lover)= revolutionary; *visal* (union with the beloved) = social change, etc.³¹ Others, like Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, are eager to recover Faiz’s engagement with older Islamic and Urdu-specific symbolic traditions, and to challenge the idea that these aesthetics are uniquely political in Faiz’s employment.³² Following this second line in “The Politics of Enchantment,” Taimoor Shahid warns that “casting [Faiz] into the mold of a ‘third-world’ poet constrains his poetry to only one dimension, blinding us from studying and appreciating his aesthetic technique, which creates layers of meanings and possibilities that make him a poet unbound except by his language and technique.”³³ While taking Shahid’s critique seriously, it is my aim here to demonstrate that recovering Faiz’s engagement with a larger network of artists in the “third-world” or “global-south” need not come at the expense of a close attention to his “language and technique.”

By comparing two very different kinds of writing within Faiz’s *oeuvre*, I call attention to the “aesthetic technique” that distinguishes his poetic treatments of political matters from those that are, in every sense, more prosaic. These text represent not only different genres, but very different ways of imagining the future. I want to suggest that we understand these pieces through their grammars of futurity, ways of speaking that are determined both by genre and by the different horizons of possibility in the historical moment during which each was written.

FRAGILE FUTURITY: PRISON VERSES 1948-1954

In late July of 1949, the Chilean government sent writer and veteran diplomat Juan Marín to establish official relations with the newly independent state of India. In their official letters of appointment, Sub-secretary Truco, and Minister Soto both extend their

³¹ Gopi Chand Narang, “Tradition and Innovation in Faiz Ahmed Faiz,” in *Daybreak: Writings on Faiz*, ed. Yasmin Hamid (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³² Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “Faiz and the Classical Ghazal,” in *Daybreak: Writings on Faiz*, ed. Yasmin Hamid (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³³ Taimoor Shahid, “The Politics of Enchantment: Remapping the Precapital in Faiz Ahmad Faiz’s Postcolonial Poetry,” *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 28 (2013): 233.

thanks to Marín for taking on the position, and for the information he has already sent to them in his first official report. This confidential document, the first archived act of the newly appointed ambassador, is titled “Genesis, development and past and present activities of the Communist Party of India.”³⁴

Why was the development of Communism the primary concern of diplomatic relations between Chile and India? Actual relations between the two nations continued much as they had when India was a British colony. Chile’s material interests were in selling guano fertilizer and buying jute. The challenges to these objectives lay in the relative weakness of the newly independent Indian rupee, protectionist trade policies instituted by the Nehru government, the delicacy of establishing diplomatic relations with India’s “jealous brother” Pakistan, and in a protracted gold-smuggling scandal involving the Chilean delegate to Turkey, in which Marín played a small and unwitting part.³⁵ The potential spread of Communism was not among these challenges. Why, then, does it take pride of place in the exchanges between Marín and the home office in Santiago? In answering that question, we should not lose sight of the presence of “confidential information from the United States ambassador” as an indicator that the US was a major source of both information and pressure within Marín’s reports.³⁶ That is, even as the reports speak *about* the attitudes of the North Indian peasant or the rise and fall of the *Telangana* movement, they are speaking *to* the vast proxy zone in the West’s battle against international Communism, a zone of which Chile, India and Pakistan all formed a part.

In fact, the same government that charged Marín with the urgent task of writing a report on the Communist party in India had, just a year earlier, suddenly outlawed the Communist party within its own borders. Three years later, Marín would include a note in his annual report about the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, which deeply impacted the

³⁴ Manuel Truco to Juan Marín, July 30 1949, Box 2858, Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Santiago de Chile.

³⁵ Juan Marín, 1949-1952, Box 2858, 3113, and 3252, Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Santiago de Chile.

³⁶ Juan Marín, “Legacion de Chile Diplomático: Génesis, desarrollo y actividades pasadas y recientes del Partido Comunista de India,” July 13, 1949 Box 2858, Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Santiago de Chile.

position of Communism, left-leaning organizations and intellectuals in Pakistan.³⁷ Nearly 15 years later, Pablo Neruda and Faiz Ahmed Faiz would meet face to face for the first time in the USSR, but it was this moment in the late 1940s and early 1950s in which their political and artistic trajectories most significantly overlapped. Their direct involvement in these two nodes of the same proxy conflict demonstrates how left-leaning political “commitment”, which at other times offered a sense of purpose and connection, even occasionally material support, could also be a source of profound risk.

Faiz and The Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case

In 1951, Faiz was arrested for conspiring to orchestrate a communist-backed coup against the government of Liaquat Ali Khan. There is some disagreement about the level of threat posed by the “conspiracy”: Pakistani historiography tends to define it rather breathlessly as “the first coup attempt in Pakistan,” to cite the subtitle of an account by Hasan Zaheer.³⁸ Ayesha Jalal credits the Pakistani government itself with perpetuating this version of the case, saying, “despite ample evidence to the contrary, state controls on the creation and flow of information have ensured that the case has come to be remembered as a genuine conspiracy that was tantamount to treason.”³⁹ In contrast, she frames the case as “a convenient pretext to crack down on prominent writers and trade unionists” and later “a watershed in the systematic suppression of independent critical thinking in the newly independent country.”⁴⁰ Aamir Mufti echoes her assertion, calling the case part of “a general crackdown on the Pakistani Left,” which “marked the beginnings of Pakistan’s realignment as a front-line US satellite in the Cold War and as a reliable regional client.”⁴¹ He, Jalal and Carlo Coppola all agree that it was Faiz’s leadership in left-leaning political causes, rather than merely his presence at the “conspiracy” meeting, which ultimately landed him in jail.

³⁷ Juan Marín, “El problema del comunismo interno y externo, (politico y militar) de India,” July 24 1951, Box 3113, Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Santiago de Chile.

³⁸ Hasan Zaheer, *The Rawalpindi Conspiracy 1951: the Times and Trial of The First Coup Attempt in Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2007).

³⁹ Ayesha Jalal, “Freedom Unbound: Faiz’s Prison Call,” in *Daybreak: Writings on Faiz*, ed. Yasmin Hamid (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 210.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Aamir Mufti, “Faiz Ahmed Faiz: Towards a Lyric History of India,” in *Enlightenment in the Colony the Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 216.

Coppola, Genoways, Amir Mufti and Ralph Russel, among others, discuss the impact of Faiz's imprisonment on his poetic development, as does Faiz himself, calling it "another adolescence" for the way it heightened his sensitivity to the possibility of the poetic in everyday life.⁴² Although there are important interpretive differences among these critics, the general story they tell about Faiz's career in this period remains constant. In the previous decade, Faiz had shifted more and more of his attention from poetry to extra-literary progressive causes. Effectively, although he was still known primarily as a poet, he had allowed editorial work and leadership positions in political organizations siphon off his energy and time from the work of writing poetry. The prison term decisively reversed this trend. Utterly cut off from public life – at times even held in solitary confinement – Faiz returned to composing poetry as a full-time endeavor.⁴³

Neruda and the *Ley Maldita*

Like Faiz, Neruda spent the 1940s becoming increasingly involved in Left-leaning political causes. After many years working as a diplomat of increasing importance, Neruda had transitioned to a role in domestic public life, elected in 1945 as a senator for the northern regions of Antofagasta and Tarapacá. The following year, he actively campaigned on behalf of Gabriel González Videla, who ascended to the presidency from the Radical Party, backed by a coalition including a voting block of the Communist Party, which, Carlos Huneeus emphasizes, was stronger and more securely established in Chile than in other Latin American countries at that time.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, within the first year of his presidency, González Videla made a dramatic rightward shift, strongly aligning with the United States and outlawing the very Communist Party that had helped him gain his seat. This law, known officially as the *Ley de Defensa Permanente de la Democracia* (Law of Permanent Defense of Democracy) and colloquially as the *Ley Maldita* (Cursed Law), curbed workers' ability to unionize and strike and allowed for the detention of communist affiliates, in addition to

⁴² Carlo Coppola, "Another Adolescence" in *Daybreak: Writings on Faiz*, ed. Yasmin Hamid (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013); Ted Genoways, "'Let Them Snuff Out the Moon': Faiz Ahmed Faiz's Prison Lyrics in *Dast-e Saba*," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 19 (2004): 94–119; Ralph Russel, "Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Poetry, Politics and Pakistan," in *Daybreak: Writings on Faiz*, ed. Yasmin Hamid (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴³ Genoways, "'Let Them Snuff Out the Moon,'" 94–119.

⁴⁴ Carlos Huneeus, *La Guerra Fría Chilena: Gabriel González Videla y La Ley Maldita*. (Santiago de Chile: Debate, 2009).

proscribing the Communist Party in Chile. After a stirring speech on the senate floor in January of 1948 (*Yo acuso*), Neruda's diplomatic immunity was stripped and an order was issued for his arrest. Rather than submit, Neruda went into hiding – effectively under house arrest – where he remained until he could be smuggled across the border to Argentina in 1949.⁴⁵

It was in this atmosphere of desperate conditions and hair's-breadth escapes that Neruda completed his magnum opus, an epic poem about the history and fate of the Americas, *Canto general*. The details of Neruda's exploits in the period – being smuggled on horseback over the Andes to Argentina, making his way to Europe on the borrowed passport of Guatemalan novelist and diplomat Miguel Ángel Asturias, receiving a hero's welcome in Paris by Pablo Picasso– that have colored the reception of *Canto general*, and led to an outsized perception of the role played by Neruda's period of *clandestinidad* on the finished work. Instead, as Neruda scholar Enrico Santí rightly emphasizes, the bulk of the epic poem was already finished in the last year before its publication.⁴⁶ Unlike Faiz, Neruda was better able to balance political commitments with poetic productivity – indeed, except for his residence in South Asia from 1927-1930, Neruda had always been startlingly prolific, while Faiz remained methodically slow at the best of times and often feared that his poetic gift had dried up completely.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it is unquestionably the case that living in hiding gave Neruda greater time to write and revise, and several sections of *Canto general* were added during this period that clearly reflect contemporary events and his attitude toward them.

These experiences of political oppression had a similar effect on the reception of Neruda and Faiz's poetry in this period, as well as the status of the poets themselves. However, before suggesting how these experiences helped move both poets more firmly into the Soviet sphere of influence, it is worth exploring some of the ways these parallel experiences produced similar aesthetics in their collections.

⁴⁵ José Miguel Varas. *Neruda Clandestino* (Santiago de Chile: Alfaguara, 2003).

⁴⁶ Enrico Mario Santí. "Canto General: The Politics of the Book," *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 32, 3 (1978): 254.

⁴⁷ Ibid; Genoways, "Let Them Snuff Out the Moon," 94–119.

Aesthetics of Confinement

One of the primary formal features that unites Neruda and Faiz's poetry of the confinement period is the way they use "paratext" – epigraphs indicating date and place of composition – to encourage readers to align their poetry with each poet's biography at this time. Drawing on his own bitter experience with the *Ley maldita* and other effects of alignment in the era, Neruda actually calls upon the date 1948 as a metonym for political corruption and cruelty, most obviously in the subsection of Canto IV titled "Crónica de 1948," which opens *Mal año, año de ratas, año impuro!* [Terrible year, year of rats, impure year].⁴⁸ Faiz's labeling is simultaneously more straightforward and subtler. As Mufti and others note, Faiz often appended his prison poems with dates and places. While certain poems of this period reference his sentence in their titles ("Zindan kī ek subah" [One morning in prison], "Zindan kī ek sham," [One night in prison] and "qaid-e- tanhai" [solitary confinement] most obviously), according to Mufti, he also used paratext to indicate more politicized readings of otherwise a-temporal and a-political symbolism.⁴⁹ This is evident, for example, in the paratext "Lahore jail, 28 March/ Montgomery jail, 15 April '54," which conditions our reading of "*Ae roshniyon ke shehr*," [City of Lights], one of the poems discussed below.⁵⁰

At the same time, the use of paratext in these two cases also highlights an important difference in Faiz and Neruda's material conditions during their respective periods of confinement. By the time he went into hiding, Neruda knew that whatever he wrote would be wholly banned in Chile.⁵¹ Since he could not hope to gain a legitimate platform no matter what his tone, and since, by that time, Neruda knew he would be published in Europe and other parts of Latin America regardless of his status in Chile, there was no incentive for him to obscure the politics of *Canto general*. The contemporary dates in *Canto general*, therefore, function much as those in the more distant past—they lend his poetry the weight of historical writing, and suggest that his personal experience as a fugitive fits into a larger pattern of oppression. In part, Faiz's political meaning is more submerged because the

⁴⁸ Pablo Neruda, *Canto General* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1989), 225. Emphasis original.

⁴⁹ Mufti, "Faiz Ahmed Faiz," 225.

⁵⁰ Faiz Ahmad Faiz, *The Rebel's Silhouette: Selected Poems*, Rev. ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 32.

⁵¹ Varas, *Neruda Clandestino*.

aesthetics of his genre of poetry value multiplicity of meaning over concreteness.⁵² More importantly, however, publishing from prison meant that Faiz faced censorship that would have made it impossible to express political critiques more openly.⁵³

Of course, a poet's attraction to symbolic language is not merely a matter of material conditions. There are striking similarities in the symbolic language through which Faiz and Neruda express their political commitments. Let us look, for instance, at the conclusion of Canto IV, which offers many parallels to Faiz's prison writing:

Mi pueblo, pueblo mío, levanta tu destino!
Rompe la cárcel, abre los muros que te cierran!
Aplasta el paso torvo de la rata que manda
Desde el Palacio: sube tus lanzas a la aurora,
Y en lo más alto deja que tu estrella iracunda
Fulgure, iluminando los caminos de América
–
[Oh people, my people, claim your destiny!
Break the prison, open the walls that hold you in
Close off the grim path of the rat who gives orders
From the palace: raise your spears to the dawn
And from on high let your furious star,
Shine on, lighting the pathways of America.]⁵⁴

⁵² Shahid, "The Politics of Enchantment," 222.

⁵³ Genoways, "Let Them Snuff Out the Moon," 94–119. While Genoways and others have linked the "ambiguous" style of Faiz's writing to the conditions of his imprisonment, one might locate many of these same features in his poetry of other eras. It is the general ambiguity of his politics and fragility of his projections in verse that allow Faiz to remain politically useful for a variety of causes, including diametrically opposed critical interpretations of his poetry. This is quite different from Neruda, who explicitly decried poetic ambiguity as too effete for the social project to which he had become increasingly committed. "Qué hicisteis vosotros/... ante el reinado de la angustia...? [What did you all do/ ... when faced with the reign of misery?] he demands of other poets in Canto IV. "No hicisteis nada sino la fuga" You did nothing but flee]" We can tell that Neruda counts his past self among the 'vosotros' condemned in this passage from his invocation, among their many epithets, of "amapolas surrealistas encendidas/ en una tumba." [surrealist poppies lit up/ inside a tomb] The poppy was one of the most potent and multivalent symbols that Neruda developed during the Residencia era and also the symbol through which he metonymically encapsulated that period when initially rejecting it in 1936 as "la metafísica cubierta de amapolas" [metaphysics covered in poppies] in the conversion poem "Explico algunas cosas." Yet Neruda's tendency toward explicit (sometimes quite troubling) political positions in his poetry has reduced its utility for contemporary scholars. Faiz's circumspection, on the other hand, has arguably become an incredible asset to his canonization.

⁵⁴ Neruda, *Canto General*, 235.

Here the “furious star” of the people, their spears in the dawn light, echo the “burning arrows of hope” in the quiver of a prince who storms the prison walls at the end of Faiz’s poem “*Zindan kī ek subah*,” [“A prison daybreak] and the lamps lit for lovers that, set high, can also lead home those who struggle for the revolution in “*Ae roshniyon ke shehr*” [City of Lights].⁵⁵ Similarly, here as in “*Ae roshniyon ke shehr*” prison walls are both a literal barrier for the poets themselves and a metonym for state power.⁵⁶

Yet at other moments, the two poets call on the same symbols to do very different work. In many poems, Faiz imagines the individual body as a source of scant but essential liquid vitality for positive, future-oriented action. Thus, in “*August 1952*,” blood becomes oil for a lamp that enables a gathering, or the drops of water that allow a few plants to grow in the desert.⁵⁷ In Faiz’s first prison *qitta*, blood also becomes a legible sign of resistance as ink: “Why should I mourn if my tablet and pen are forbidden/ when I have dipped my fingers in my own blood until they stain?”⁵⁸ This contrasts against *Canto general*, in which blood represents the price exacted from the populace by capitalist tyrants, whom Neruda compares to vampires, lice, and carrion-eating rats. In these verses, America’s vital liquid transforms into oil that fills not the lamps of meeting, but the pockets of the Standard Oil Company; when blood showers onto the sand, it does so not to make the desert bloom, but to foul the earth, betraying the common biblical origin of all mankind.

In Faiz’s prison poetry, positive developments are slow and small, and the contribution of the individual dwarfed by the size of the task he faces. Lines like “*dil se pahīm khyāl kehta hai/ Itnī shirīn hai zindagī is pal...*” [again and again the idea comes to my heart/ how beautiful life is at this moment] in “*Zindan ki ek sham*” emphasize the power of a single transcendent image to combat the threat of despair.⁵⁹ The poet’s purpose, then, is to capture the beauty and value of these small, otherwise senseless actions and moments as an antidote to the “poison” of prison life.⁶⁰ In contrast, Neruda’s aim in *Canto general* is to create epic poems to other revolutionary exemplars or to call for direct, dramatic action. Indeed, Santí names this mode in Neruda’s writing “prophetic” for its tendency to spell out

⁵⁵ Faiz, *The Rebel’s Silhouette*, 22; 32.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 32.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 16.

⁵⁸ Genoways, ““Let Them Snuff Out the Moon,”” 100.

⁵⁹ Faiz, *The Rebel’s Silhouette*, 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

the future in decisive terms.⁶¹ While Faiz's verses sought to maintain hope for the prisoner whose walls were apparently unbreakable, Neruda here urges those same prisoners to tear the wall down.

This distinction is most notable in the grammar of futurity through which each poet expresses his vision of revolution. In his confinement, Faiz suggests the fragility of hope by writing in the subjunctive. The changes anticipated from revolutionary action are almost always presented in the subjunctive, often explicitly contrasted with the grammatical certainty of oppression. We can see this contrast in the *ghazal* "*Shafaq ki rākh mein jal bujhar gayā stārah hajūm*,": "*sal gaye hont, koi zakhim sale yā na sale/ ... khul gaye zakhim, koi phūl khule ya na khule*." [lips **have been sewn up**, perhaps some wounds **may be** too/ Wounds **have been opened up**, perhaps some flowers **may be** too].⁶² In *Canto general*, on the other hand, Neruda tends to present both his critique and his vision for the future in powerful terms of certainty. Like Faiz, Neruda uses the completed past tense and the past habitual to describe acts of oppression, but instead of contrasting it to the subjunctive tense of future possibility, he meets it head on with direct commands – *Rompe la carcel*, **abre** los muros [**break** the prison, **open** the walls] – and unequivocal predictions of what *will* be – "*Qué pasará, preguntas, me preguntas? / Está mi corazón en esta lucha/ Mi pueblo vencerá...*" [What **will happen** you ask, you ask of me? / My heart is in this fight/ my people **will be victorious**].⁶³

At other points in his life, Faiz's poetry dabbled in the kind prophetic futurity so common in Neruda's work. Shahid suggests that it is the "apocalyptic" strain – most notable in Faiz's poem "Va Yabqā Vajhu Rabbika," more popularly known as "Hum Dekhenge" – which marks it as religious and therefore incompatible with Eurocentric Marxism. Two points are worth mentioning. First, the repetition of the future tense – "hum **dekhenge**," [we **will see**], whose grammatical certainty is underscored by the following line **lazim hai** ke hum **bhi dekhenge** [**It is certain** that we **too will see**] – is one of the relatively few instances in which Faiz approaches Neruda's level of prophetic certainty. Second and more significant, Santí, describing the same type of millenarian pronouncements in *Canto general*,

⁶¹ Santí, "Canto General," 256.

⁶² Faiz, *The Rebel's Silhouette*, 14. All bolded emphasis in the following lines added.

⁶³ Neruda, *Canto General*, 232.

in fact asserts that it is precisely in the realm of prophecy and millenarianism that Marxism and the Abrahamic religions find their common ground.⁶⁴ Thus, while Shahid sees a conflict between Faiz's religious "enchantment" and orthodox (and, in his reading, Eurocentric) Marxism, it is clear that Faiz was not alone in "vernacularizing Marxism to a non-European religious episteme."⁶⁵ Indeed, associating Faiz with other "committed" poets of the global south makes it clear just how common this "vernacularization" was.

Yet there is one significant moment where it is instead Neruda who approaches Faiz's more contingent characterization of the revolutionary future in *Canto general*, and it is no accident, I think, that it comes in one of the only cantos he wrote entirely during his year in hiding. The subjunctive tense frames Canto IX, "*Que despierte el leñador*," [May the Woodcutter Awaken] in both its title and its closing plea, setting it apart from the rest of the book. In "*Que despierte el leñador*," Neruda contrasts the dastardly actions of the US government as an agent of Capitalist exploitation and a supporter of Latin American dictators – accusations repeated in several other Cantos – with the landscape and common people of the United States, to whom he offers his love and solidarity. This solidarity, in turn, can be used to defeat the rapacious "*furioso*" of United States alignment, "*Tu y yo vamos a decir al furioso:/ "My dear guy, hasta aquí no más llegaste",/ más acá la tierra nos pertenece/ **para que no se oiga** el silbido/ de la ametralladora sino una/ canción, y otra canción, y otra canción*" [You and I are going to say to the furious one:/ "My dear guy, you have come here and no further,/from here on the land belongs to us/ so that **we might not hear** the whistling/ of a machine gun but rather/ a song, and another song, and another song].⁶⁶

Notice that while the section begins in the future tense, it transitions to the subjunctive, suggesting that while the initial act of resistance is certain, its outcome can only be hoped for, never guaranteed. The entire section that follows is posed as an "if-then" hypothetical scenario about continued US aggression, to which Neruda appends another set of subjunctive pleas: "*Que nada de esto **pase**/ que **despierte** el Leñador*" [Let none of this

⁶⁴ Santí, "Canto General," 256.

⁶⁵ Shahid, "The Politics of Enchantment," 228.

⁶⁶ Neruda, *Canto General*, 317.

come to pass/ let the Woodcutter awaken].⁶⁷ All that is certain in the final section of the Canto is Neruda's own position as a poet, and unlike in other moments of the *Canto general*, the role of a poet is intensely circumscribed "Soy nada más que un poeta/ ... Yo no vengo a resolver nada/ Yo vine aquí para cantar/ y **para que cantes** conmigo." [I am nothing more than a poet/... I have not come here to resolve anything/ I came here to sing/ so that **you would sing** with me].⁶⁸

Santí uses the epigraph for "Que despierte el leñador", Luke 10:15, to identify it strongly with the prophetic tendency that he claims characterizes *Canto general* as a whole.⁶⁹ Still, the quiet moment in the final section of "*Que despierte el leñador*," when Neruda's aesthetics of confinement most closely resemble Faiz's, is also the one in which his verses "depart radically from the traditional judgment speech structure."⁷⁰ By the end of the poem, Santí writes, "the speaker's prophetic identity ceases to be clear."⁷¹ That is, Neruda seems to purposely reject the mantle of a prophet in order to affirm the uncertainty of the future and the relative impotence of the modern poet on the stage of world history.

It is no accident that Neruda embraces this form of subjunctive futurity in the first poem he wrote after going into hiding. For all their important differences, living in hiding and living in prison are united by a set of externally imposed constraints. Among these spatial constraints are the most obvious: how much and in what manner one can move around, whom one can meet, when or why one might be unexpectedly transferred between locations. Yet these constraints also imply a temporal dimension. Neruda entertained and ultimately abandoned several escape plans before hitting upon the one that would succeed; as a part of that plan, he spent weeks in constant readiness for flight, informed of the final plan only hours before it went into effect.⁷² Faiz was imprisoned under a set of laws specially written post-facto to criminalize a meeting that did not meet the existing standards for a conspiracy. Subject to the whims of his captors and the capricious rulings of a young and struggling government, he was even, at times, under threat of execution.⁷³ His

⁶⁷ Ibid, 321.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 324.

⁶⁹ Santí, "Canto General," 269.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 271.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Varas, *Neruda Clandestino*.

⁷³ Genoways, "Let Them Snuff Out the Moon," 94–119.

future must have seemed deeply uncertain even after his case finally received its ruling. The fact that these individual circumstances were brought about by the sudden, violent rightward shifts in the Chilean and Pakistani governments only underscored the fragility of former political triumphs. Making concrete plans for the future, let alone a prophecy about the imminent and inevitable demise of political oppression, would seem ludicrous under such conditions. Instead, both poets sheltered their revolutionary hopes in the poetry of everyday life and small gestures of solidarity, gestures that became increasingly important in the following decades, as we shall see.

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE: CUBAN PROSE, 1973

The Soviet Sphere

Faiz's imprisonment as part of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case had two important consequences that served to bring him more fully into the Soviet orbit and ultimately set up the circumstances for his visit to Cuba in the 1970s. Ludmila Vassilyeva suggests that it was this imprisonment that brought Faiz's work to the attention of Soviet tastemakers, which led to the popularization of his poetry in the USSR, his receipt of the Lenin Prize, and, unexpectedly, his brief encounter with Neruda.⁷⁴ At the same time, Faiz probably realized the threat of ideologically motivated imprisonment would hang over him for as long as he remained at home, even after his official sentence was served. In a country plagued by frequent regime changes, Faiz rightly intuited the fragility of his own position and sought to strengthen outside ties.

After Faiz was released, Soviet Russia was eager to have him. As Vassilyeva explains, the Soviet government popularized Faiz's poetry in Russian translation, while at the same time, Moscow was home to a small but devoted group of Urdu linguists who could appreciate Faiz's poetry in its original language.⁷⁵ Finally, it must be emphasized that the cultural position of poetry in Russia and Pakistan is relatively similar, a point that I'll return to shortly. Thus, although Russia was in many ways a *foreign* place, Faiz's experience of it was shaped by *familiarity*: a shared set of cultural mores surrounding poetry and a ready-

⁷⁴ Vassilyeva, "Faiz Ahmed Faiz and the Soviet Union," 191.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 192-204.

made audience knowledgeable about his work. During his visit to Russia, Faiz developed intimate relationships with many Soviet citizens. Vasilyeva recalls:

I have no idea how, but [Faiz] would be able to build up a rapport even without an interpreter, getting across to people who, far from any knowledge of Urdu or Persian, were totally non-conversant even in English. Once, referring to Faiz, the renowned Russian poetess Rimma Kazkova said "poets have their own language; the language of silence."⁷⁶

Here we see a repetition of image of "speaking in tongues" with which we began, and by extension the suggestion that Faiz experienced Russia unencumbered by burdens of cultural and linguistic difference. His Russian travelogue reflects this sense of familiarity in its title *Mah-o-Sāl-e Āshnai* [*Acquaintances of months and years*].

Safarnamah-e Cuba

The account of his 1973 journey to Cuba, in contrast, could be subtitled *Acquaintances of days and weeks*. Ten years after his meeting with Neruda in the USSR, Faiz was called upon to dust off his apparently preternatural abilities in Spanish, this time for a two-week tour of the Caribbean island. The previous section has shown how Faiz made an unconscious but striking parallel to counterparts in Latin America through his responses to alignment and confinement. In the *Safarnamah-e Cuba*, Faiz himself suggests several parallels between the political situations of his home country and the "*dūr darāz gher-marūf jazīra*", [far off, unknown island] where he finds himself.⁷⁷

Faiz opens the *safarnāmāh* by warning his audience that the Cuba he is about to describe is neither merely the place where sugar and cigarettes come from (a pre-revolutionary understanding of Cuba) nor merely a homogeneous, prototypical soviet republic (a post-revolutionary understanding).⁷⁸ Yet, having debunked these two erroneous forms of knowledge, Faiz has very little left to build on. He thus conceives of the *Safarnāmāh-e Cuba* as an introduction to a country about which is readers have *no* preexisting knowledge. Moreover, unlike Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez, who

⁷⁶ Ibid, 204.

⁷⁷ Faiz Ahmad Faiz, *Safarnama-e Cuba* (Lahore: National Publishing House, 1973), 3.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

visited Cuba frequently and wrote his own travelogue “Cuba de cabo a rabo” [Cuba Inside Out] in 1975, the Pakistani poet could not reasonably exhort his countrymen “vayan a verlo” [Go see it (for yourself)].⁷⁹

Most of the *Safarnāmāh* is an orthodox recapitulation of Cuban history as a teleological journey toward the 1959 revolution, followed by a description of pre- and post-revolutionary population statistics that underscore the urgency of revolutionary reform. Needless to say, these features combine to make *Safarnāmāh-e Cuba* a relatively impersonal and un-literary text. Almost nothing about it suggests the artistic prowess that Faiz brings to bear on other projects.

If much of *Safarnāmāh-e Cuba* reads like a press release from the Cuban Ministry of Information, that is probably an accurate reflection of Faiz’s level of access. To diagnose why this is so in a general sense, we may draw on Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s famous essay “Tourists of the Revolution.”⁸⁰ As what Enzensberger terms a “delegate,” Faiz’s trip was paid for and controlled by the Cuban government. His gaze would have been, at all times, directed toward elements that would show Cuba in the best light. Unlike García Márquez, who grounds his claim to truthfulness in his ability to move about the country and speak with people *independent* of Cuban officials, Faiz was both financially and linguistically at the mercy of his hosts in a country that spoke neither Punjabi or Urdu, neither Persian or Arabic, and hardly any English. Yet, it was not simply Faiz’s position as a truly *foreign* “delegate” that limited his perspective. It is also that Cuba itself had changed.

As Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia suggests, travelogues to Cuba in the early 1960s compare the post-revolutionary island nation, sometimes quite literally, to the island in Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Indeed, in the early 60s, the flourishing of arts and culture that took place as Batista-era censorship laws were reversed earned the post-revolutionary Cuban government a good deal of legitimacy among liberal intellectuals in Latin America, Europe

⁷⁹ Although García Márquez can make a significantly greater claim than Faiz to having an independent perspective on Cuba, his travelogue tends to highlight the same government-approved narratives and achievements as *Safarnāmāh-e Cuba*. The concrete difference between the two accounts lies mostly in García Márquez’s greater cultural proximity to the Cuban people. Gabriel García Márquez, “Cuba de cabo a rabo,” *Colectivos De Jóvenes Comunistas* (1975), 18. <http://old.cjc.es/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/cuba-de-cabo-a-rabo.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Tourists of the Revolution.” in *Critical Essays*, ed. Reinhold Grimm and Bruce Armstrong (New York: Continuum, 1982).

and the United States. Moreover, the Cuban cultural body Casa de las Américas is credited by many critics for helping to launch the Latin American “Boom” of the 1960s.⁸¹

Yet, as Stephen Fay, Nicholas Hewitt and Todd Tietchen make clear in their studies of Western travelogues to Cuba, over the course of the 60s, that perception began to change.⁸² From 1961 onward, Cuba experienced a progressive tightening of post-revolutionary orthodoxy. A large part of Western liberal support for the new government evaporated after 1971 when the government arrested the poet Herberto Padilla for anti-revolutionary activities. This was followed by a wholesale reorganization of cultural institutions that inaugurated the darkest period for artistic production in post-revolutionary Cuba.⁸³ Had Faiz traveled to Havana instead of Sochi a decade earlier, he might have found a cultural climate more similar to the one he experienced in Russia: a thriving community of fellow writers eager to exchange ideas with a foreign artist. But in 1973, this was no longer possible.

The Aesthetics of Revolution

For these reasons, there is no Cuban poetry in the *Safarnāmāh-e Cuba*. Instead, Faiz explains, the poetry of Cuba exists in the quality of revolutionary change itself. One of Faiz’s first observations about Cuba is that the people sing all the time. As I noted previously, Russian culture felt more familiar to Faiz because of the prestige it accords to poetry. Both Russians and Pakistanis can expect minimally educated peers to draw on a repertoire of poetic citations in daily life. Likewise, they can be expected to respond with a culturally appropriate display of reverence or enthusiasm when presented with such a citation. In Faiz’s telling, Cubans display their cultural difference, but *also* their cultural *harmony*, by responding to music in the same way.

After comparing the lyrics of a Cuban *bolero* to the equivalent sentiment in an Urdu *sher*, Faiz opens out this observation to the “poetry of daily life.” He says “Is par ‘makrar’ aur

⁸¹ Juan Carlos Quintero-Herencia, *Fulguración Del Espacio: Letras e Imaginario Institucional De La Revolución Cubana, 1960-1971* (Rosario: B. Viterbo, 2002), 469, 475.

⁸² Todd F. Tietchen, *The Cubalogues: Beat Writers in Revolutionary Havana* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); Stephen Fay, “Liminal Visitors to an Island on the Edge: Sartre and Ginsberg,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 15, 4 (2011); Nicholas Hewitt, “Images of Cuba in France in the 1960s: Sartre’s ‘Ouagan Sur Le Sucre,’” *Sartre Studies International* 13, 1 (2007).

⁸³ Tietchen, *The Cubalogues*.

“vah vah” kā shōr baland hotā hai... Yahañ ghaḍi-ghaḍi aur qadam-qadam par aise hi ojūlē milte haiñ.” [on hearing this (the bolero/ the *sher*) the sound of “encore” and “wah-wah” can be heard.... Here, at every moment and at every step, one finds such wonders.]⁸⁴

In this line, Faiz draws on his audience’s understanding of poetry and its appropriate reception, in which the clever resolution of a paradox in the second half of a couplet is met with an oral response from listeners: “wah-wah.” Faiz argues that this delight of surprise inherent in poetry – that which elicits the “wah-wah” – is equally present in quotidian aspects of the Cuban revolution. He then gives a set of examples that would be understood as paradoxes to a Pakistani audience, even though most of them are not ironic in a Cuban context. A young woman who walks around in provocative clothing by day, but is transformed into a soldier by night. A martyr of the revolution who is honored on the signboard of a bar. A copy of *Das Kapital* sold in a bookstore where Fidel’s picture is pasted next to a verse from the Bible. “Every eye blazes at the talk of American politics, and yet every heart yearns for an American cigarette.”⁸⁵

We should take a moment here to emphasize how *differently* Faiz reads these vignettes from how they would be read in Latin America. For instance, García Márquez also marshals the figure of the scantily clad Cuban woman, but he does so to praise her ingenuity. In entire section called “La importancia política de la minifalda” [The political significance of the miniskirt], García Márquez emphasizes that Cuban women are still keeping up with the latest fashions even in a time of material scarcity, outdoing French women in the shortness of their skirts. Their miniskirts is, for him, “el ejemplo más hermoso de esa tremenda dignidad de la pobreza” [The most beautiful example of that tremendous dignity of poverty.]⁸⁶

If Cuban culture receives little space in the *Safarnāmāh-e Cuba*, Pakistani culture gets even less. On its surface, there is very little to suggest that Faiz is addressing a Pakistani readership at all, other than the assumption of almost absolute ignorance of the subject – and, of course, the fact that the piece is written in Urdu. Besides the citation of poetry I

⁸⁴ Of course, the Cuban people’s supposed affinity for music contains a racialized component. Faiz draws problematically on these stereotypes when he characterizes the singer of the bolero as a black woman with a “dardnāk avāz” [plaintive voice]. Faiz, *Safarnama-e Cuba*, 4.

⁸⁵ “Yahañ amerikī siyāsāt kī bāt par har ānkh se shole nikalne lagte haiñ aur amerikī cigarette ke zikar par har dil se ā haiñ.” Ibid, 5.

⁸⁶ García Márquez, “Cuba de cabo a rabo.”

referenced earlier, there are very few moments of what we might call “indigenization,” in which Faiz explains Cuba in explicitly Pakistani terms.⁸⁷ Perhaps the only other example is when Faiz encapsulates the relationship between Cuba and the United States from 1899 to 1959 in a Punjabi *muhāvarā*, or folk saying, about the notoriously conflicted relationships between women in a joint family.⁸⁸ Much more compelling, however, are the political and economic parallels that Faiz suggests in the text.

One of these is Faiz’s treatment of Cuban land reforms, undertaken a decade earlier in a series of escalating conflicts with the US. Faiz includes minute details of how these land reforms are carried out, even though these details would seem far from interesting to the lay reader. What makes them compelling, for Faiz, is the parallel they offer to Pakistan’s own history with the *zamīndārī* system of landholding and various governments’ attempts to reform it. Similarly, Faiz puts a great deal of emphasis on the absence of political corruption and nepotism in post-revolutionary Cuba. Rather than reflecting the importance of these reforms for Cuban society per-se, these themes are probably emphasized because of their significance to Pakistan, where corruption is infamously endemic.

And then there is the description of Cuban history. Unlike much of the rest of Latin America, which achieved independence in the early 1800s, Cuba was still a Spanish colony all throughout the nineteenth century. Then, in 1898, the United States became involved in the ongoing Cuban freedom struggle, quickly routing Spain from the Western Hemisphere, only to set up its former holdings as US protectorates. Faiz spends significant time on this era in Cuban history, emphasizing America’s longstanding pretensions to neo-imperial power.⁸⁹ Like Cuba, Pakistan had barely wrested itself away from British imperial power in 1947 when it was absorbed into the US sphere of influence in the Cold War. As we have seen, this political move directly impacted Faiz’s own life through the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. In this light, we may see Faiz’s focus on American imperial agency within the *safarnāmāh* not so much as an unquestioning reflection of Cuban propaganda, but also a reflection of the desire to read Cuban history comparatively.

⁸⁷ This is in contrast to Faiz’s poetry, where descriptions of political situations are almost always imbricated with the language of South Asian Islamic tradition.

⁸⁸ Faiz, *Safarnama-e Cuba*, 7. Thanks to Aditi Saraf for alerting me to the fact that idioms about family life are often invoked in political contexts in among Punjabis.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 6-8.

And perhaps, at this particular moment in Pakistani history, that reading would have made perfect sense. We must recall that during this period Faiz was employed as an advisor to the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education under the government of President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. These affiliations almost definitely explain why Faiz was invited to Cuba in the first place. Like Cuba, Pakistan had recently nationalized many industries and was in the process of overhauling its education system. At the same time, the post-revolutionary government in Cuba had transitioned from claiming international legitimacy based on its cultural efflorescence to a focus on improvement in development indicators, especially medical care and universal literacy. These two factors combine to explain why Faiz lavished so much attention on Cuban advances in education within the *safarnāmāh*. In one of the most personal and touching lines in the piece, he observes with pleasure that “ye bāt mujhe achī lagī ke... maqbare aur matbār kaṛhe karne ke bajāe yādgār rake tor par bachon ke skūl qāim kai gaye hain.” [It pleased me that... instead of erecting tombs and minarets, children’s schools have been established as memorials (to the revolution)].⁹⁰

Thus, in many places in of the *Safarnāmāh-e Cuba*, a simple description of the present in Cuba seems to encode a vision of the future in Pakistan. Indeed, this accords with the roots of the *safarnāmāh* genre in Urdu, which originated as investigations into the successes and pitfalls of foreign modes of governance for the benefit of rulers at home.⁹¹ Unfortunately for Faiz, however, there would be no opportunity to enact the reforms he observed in Cuba. Just a few years after the *Safarnāmāh* was published, the coup by General Zia removed Bhutto from power and sent Faiz into exile once again.

CONCLUSION

This chapter opened with a vignette about the “fantasy” of transnational connection that emerges from a new kind of movement enabled by Cold War cultural circuits. The body

⁹⁰ Ibid, 25.

⁹¹ Daniel Majchrowicz argues that early developments of the Urdu *safarnāmāh* served state power both by gathering information about governance in other areas, and by serving as a tool of legitimation for the court that commissioned it. *Safarnama-e Cuba* seems to fulfill both of these roles to varying degrees. Daniel Majchrowicz, “Travel and the Means to Victory: Travel Writing and Aspiration in South Asia” (Ph.D diss., Harvard University, 2015).

of the piece has explored the material conditions that imposed real limits on the ideal of connection in Faiz's life and writing, at the same time that it has tried to celebrate the new kinds of connections he imagined.

Earlier “fantasies” of the global in the Urdu-speaking world included ideas of transnational religious or ethnic identity, explorations of continuities and differences throughout South Asia, or investigations of the differences between East and West.⁹² These “fantasies” significantly overlap with academic imaginaries Cartographies of Contiguity and Cartographies of Domination. Scholars have tended to understand Faiz’s own itineraries in a similar fashion, highlighting his ties to greater South Asia, his transnational religious solidarity with the Middle East, and his relationship to England. The point of this piece has been to highlight the way that Cold War politics enabled a significantly *new* set of possibilities for (and limitations on) movement around the world. With them came new visions of worldliness for authors like Faiz.

Yet the idea of “fantasy” is also useful to describe the disjuncture between Faiz's projections of the future and the version of the future that ultimately came to pass. The following chapters will trace the unfolding of the *literary* future Faiz seems to imagine in light of his encounter with Neruda in the opening vignette. Yet this disjuncture is equally present in the political future Faiz seems to imagine for Pakistan in his account of Cuba. The fact that both visions are betrayed in the real course of events makes their recollection particularly painful. It is in fact the fragile futurity of the prison verses that comes closest to the truth of Faiz’s life.

⁹² Green, Nile. “Africa in Indian Ink: Urdu Articulations of Indian Settlement in East Africa” *The Journal of African History* 53, 2 (2012): 131–150.

**Trans-Migrations:
A Chilean Novelist, an Indian Poet, and Transcending the Limits of Queer
Regionalism**

INTRODUCTION⁹³

Diplomatic records say very little about Augusto d'Halmar's time as a consular official in Calcutta. Tucked away in the 1908 records of correspondence with Great Britain in the Archivo Histórico of the Foreign Relations Ministry in Santiago de Chile, a single telegram attests to the fact that d'Halmar left his post suddenly and without prior permission. "According to private information received by this legation," it concludes, d'Halmar had fallen desperately ill and fled India in fear of his life. He was later awarded an official transfer to Peru.⁹⁴

In its brevity, the official record cannot convey the personal significance of d'Halmar's Calcutta sojourn and the illness he faced there. For that a different archive is necessary. Ricardo Loebell, a retired archivist at the *Archivo del Autor* in Chile's National Library and a local d'Halmar expert, explained that d'Halmar's mystery illness was an utterly transformative experience for him. His illness caused d'Halmar's skin to peel and fall away, such that when he recovered, it seemed as if he had very literally been reborn into a new body.⁹⁵ It is an experience that d'Halmar recounts over and over again in the novels of his so-called 'exoticist' period, writing about India and other foreign locales.

⁹³ Research for this chapter in Santiago de Chile was funded by a Tinker Pre-Dissertation Fieldwork Grant. A portion of this piece was presented as part of the Committee on Comparative Gender Studies' sponsored panel at the American Comparative Literature Association annual meeting in 2014. As the daughter of someone who transitioned 15 years ago and now identifies as a lesbian woman, I was first drawn to this project because of my own observations about how a trans-identified person can adapt socially and legally mandated practices – changing their clothes and name – into more personal processes of revising their genealogy, reclaiming their identity, and re-imagining their future.

⁹⁴ "Segun informaciones privadas que se han recibido en esta Legacion, parece que el Señor Thompson contrajo en Calcutta una seria enfermedad y que por consejo de su médico abandonó la ciudad sin pérdida de tiempo, porque su residencia allá habria puesto en peligro su vida." 26 August, 1908. Volume 357 Archivo Histórico, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Santiago de Chile. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁹⁵ Ricardo Loebell, in conversation with the author, August 20, 2013.

In what follows, I retrace the connection d'Halmar made between his physical "migrations," especially the year-long residence in India, with his philosophical interest in "transmigration," or the movement of subjectivities through various bodies, places and times. In bringing together his life and writing with that of the Urdu-speaking Indian poet Miraji, I draw further on the two levels suggested by the title of this piece: the physical level, at which both authors engaged in "trans" practices like dressing in drag, and the metaphysical level at which they associated these practices with the construction of a fluid identity, unmoored from the geographic, cultural, linguistic, and religious ties of their birth. The comparison of these authors presents a conundrum. It was the identification of Miraji and d'Halmar as queer figures that initially brought their affinities to my attention. And yet the scholarly process of accommodating each author into a queer framework has left much of their "trans" practice out of frame. Moreover, the recent turn toward theories of "queer regionalism" seems to foreclose the possibility of cross-cultural comparison all together. To address this apparent impasse, I will examine three types of literary and bodily practices that link d'Halmar and Miraji together as "trans" figures and the similarly idiosyncratic understandings of renunciation and reincarnation that inform those practices: the *transgenic* practice of claiming cross-cultural lineage through renaming, the *translational* practice of claiming foreign influence through adaptation, and *transvestite* practice of claiming transcendence through cross-dressing. The shift of focus away from sexual practice and onto these issues of identity transformation enables a kind of cross-cultural comparison that, for reasons discussed in the following section, has not been adequately addressed in existing scholarship on these figures.

CONVERSION THERAPY: THE QUEER REHABILITATION OF D'HALMAR AND MIRAJI

Augusto d'Halmar (born Augusto Goemine Thomson) shot to fame at the beginning of the twentieth century with the publication of his first novel *Juana Lucero*, a trenchant critique of fin-de-siècle Chilean society through a localized retelling of Emile Zola's *Nana*. *Juana Lucero* is still far and away his best-known novel in Chile, and the only one to achieve

canonization.⁹⁶ D'Halmar seemed to have cemented his status as a leading literary light by instituting and then becoming the first winner of the Chilean *Premio Nacional de Literatura* in 1942.

Thus, it is surprising how quickly d'Halmar's star faded after his death in 1950. The primary reason for this, according to scholar Jaime Galgani, is that d'Halmar's fame was always deeply intertwined with his cult of personality—the mentoring relationships he maintained with groups of aspiring writers, his own penchant for constant reinvention—and once that personality was no longer a gravitational force in Chilean public life, his readership quickly evaporated. Indeed, Galgani adds, d'Halmar experienced a similar slump within his lifetime, during the 28 years he lived outside of Chile, beginning with his acceptance of a diplomatic post in Calcutta in 1907.⁹⁷ This so-called “exoticist” period, including his residences in India, Peru and Spain, yielded the numerical majority of his writings, but until the late 1990s, these works remained an afterthought in the secondary literature. Then, in a matter of only a few years at the turn of this century, d'Halmar and his “exoticist” works emerged with force thanks to the scholarship of Silvia Molloy, Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, and Robert Richmond Ellis, this time with a new celebratory label and a new “first”: Latin America's first openly gay author.

As was the case with d'Halmar, Miraji's reputation within the Urdu literary sphere was only somewhat related to his written output, a mere fraction of which was published during his lifetime. Instead, his impact was diffused over various fields: as a leading member of and antagonist to various literary associations, and as an editor, a cultural critic and literary translator for European, East Asian and regional North Indian literature.⁹⁸ Even more so than in the case of d'Halmar, however, Miraji's reputation for eccentric habits and personal presentation has arguably overshadowed his critical reception as a writer. Like his erstwhile friend and Saadat Hasan Manto, or the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz (discussed in the previous chapter), Miraji was part of a generation of modern Urdu writers who celebrated their birth centennial in 2012. Unlike Faiz and Manto, Miraji was not generally included in

⁹⁶ In fact, generations of newspapers bemoan the fact that *Juana Lucero* is the only of d'Halmar's novels that Chileans regularly read. Augusto d'Halmar, Volume 1-2. Santiago de Chile: Archivo de Recortes, Biblioteca Nacional.

⁹⁷ Jaime Galgani, in conversation with the author. July 22, 2013.

⁹⁸ Geeta Patel, *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings: On Gender, Colonialism, and Desire in Miraji's Urdu Poetry* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005).

the canon of Urdu writers studied in the United States. Then, in 2001, Miraji's work and life were rehabilitated through the monumental efforts of a single scholar, Geeta Patel. Her book, *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings*, successfully reinvigorated the study of Miraji by attaching him to queer theory.

I never would have discovered writing of either Miraji or d'Halmar if it were not for the essential queer rehabilitation performed by Geeta Patel, Silvia Molloy, and others. Yet their particular invocation of queer theory, as well as larger trends in the intersection between Gender and Sexuality Studies and various Area Studies fields, seem to foreclose the possibility of comparing these two authors.

This is in part because the particular geopolitical context in which these two figures converge—the tail end of British imperialism in South Asia—has encouraged scholars to pull d'Halmar and Miraji to opposite sides of a colonizer/colonized binary. In the case of d'Halmar, scholars have understood the queer undertones of his “exoticist” writing in light of Joseph Boone's *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*. As such, they focus on intercultural domination and overemphasize the homology of d'Halmar's writing with its European sources. The border-crossing impulse in d'Halmar's “trans” practice is almost entirely ignored—indeed, *My other self* [*Mi otro yo*], d'Halmar's most obviously cross-cultural and “trans” novel, is entirely passed over by these critics because its homoerotic content is more submerged than in his other two Indian novels, *Nirvana* [*Nirvana*] and *The shadow of smoke in the mirror* [*La sombra del humo en el espejo*]. While Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Richmond Ellis do address d'Halmar's fluid “trans” sense of self, they understand it in negative terms, as a symptom of gay self-hatred.⁹⁹

Unlike d'Halmar's case, a large section of Miraji's critical reception has always revolved around issues of his ‘deviant’ sexuality, so much so that a major aim of Patel's book was to shift the conversation away from sex. Yet there, too, the conversation about sexual *identity*—itself a fraught issue outside the Euro-American center—is too often collapsed into a discussion of sexual practice. Thus, in order to make her case that Miraji is a queer subject, Patel depends on a poorly documented homosexual affair in Lahore, the same one that

⁹⁹ Héctor Domínguez Rubalcava, *La modernidad abyecta : formación del discurso homosexual en hispanoamérica* (Veracruz: Biblioteca Universidad Veracruzana, 2001); Robert Richmond Ellis, “A Passage to the Self: Homoerotic Orientalism and Hispanic Life-Writing,” *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 30.1 (2005): 75–87.

Manto, in his fictionalized account of Miraji's life "Mr. Icy-Hot," characterized as "absolutely platonic."¹⁰⁰ She makes a more persuasive argument when she turns to considering Miraji as a gender-non-conforming figure who moves between male and female identifications. Yet framing of Miraji as a dissenter from hegemonic masculinity fits him all too neatly into existing analysis by scholars like Ashis Nandy and Mrinalini Sinha about British stereotypes of South Asian effeminacy.¹⁰¹ In practice, this explanation cannot account for much of Miraji's bodily and written experimentation that "trans-es" across lines other than gender.

Yet, when we turn to existing studies of cross-cultural cross-dressing in late-colonial South Asia, a similar problem of models emerges. Practically speaking, the field is limited to the analysis of two personages, one of them fictional, whose seamless mimicry of South Asianness is geared toward gaining access to restricted spaces and collecting forbidden knowledge for the good of Empire: Richard Burton and Rudyard Kipling's Kim.¹⁰² The scope is sometimes widened slightly to admit T. E. Lawrence regarding British presence in the Middle East.¹⁰³ It is no overstatement to say that these figures completely dominate discussions of cross-cultural transvestism in a colonial context.

Bernard Cohn has demonstrated that the typical British response to threats of India – whether environmental or cultural – was to establish intensive regimes of bodily control that act as protection against the penetrative force of the other.¹⁰⁴ To abandon these habits

¹⁰⁰ The affair is described as "baḍa aflatuni qasm ka." Sadat Hasan, "Tapish Kashmiri," in *Kulliat-I Manto, Manto ke afsane*, ed. Humayun Ashraf (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2005), 765-773.

¹⁰¹ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997).

¹⁰² These talents earn each man his own separate chapter in Anjali Arondekar's *For the Record* and Parama Roy's *Indian Traffic*, while Kim's particularly layered ambiguities of age, gender and ethnicity merit him extended analysis in Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy*, Sara Suleri's *The Rhetoric of English India*, Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather*, and, of course, Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*. Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Parama Roy, *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*; Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st ed (New York: Knopf, 1993).

¹⁰³ Joseph Boone, "Vacation Cruises: Or, The Homoerotics of Orientalism," in *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, ed. John Hawley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁰⁴ Bernard S. Cohn, "Cloth, Clothes, and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Bernard Cohn Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

and take up Indian forms of embodiment suggests a tremendous risk to the inviolate British male body. That is why, in the midst of their transvestite experience, this same set of prototypical cross-dressers struggles to reestablish the sense of an impervious British core.¹⁰⁵ The critical analyses cited above continually emphasize moments of Western identity reclamation. Indeed they rely on them to endorse the overarching agreement that such acts facilitate domination rather than cross-cultural identification. Such exemplars therefore cannot explain d'Halmar and Miraji's "trans" activities, which sought to build cross-cultural bonds of identification, or, alternatively, to annihilate their original sense of self altogether.

Queer theory more broadly has struggled to create the opportunity for cross-cultural comparison without erasing cultural specificities of sexual and gender expression. In this chapter, I follow William Spurlin's proposal to approach this challenge with reference to existing debates about literary translation. Spurlin suggests that a practice of translation can help "navigate and linger in the ambiguities and gaps woven into the asymmetrical relations between languages and cultures" that shape discussions about sexuality and gender in the global periphery.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, many debates about global queer identities are quite literally centered on the translated names through which sexual and gender diversity is described. We might think, for instance, about Bradley Epps' challenge to the application of the English word "queer" to Latin American contexts, based in part on the fact that the additional resonances and connotations of the English term are erased in Spanish.¹⁰⁷ Naisargi Dave advocates for the English word "lesbian" as a more resonant alternative to the Hindi neologism "*samalangik*" in India,¹⁰⁸ while Lawrence Cohen's chronicle of the fierce debates around how to name Indian MSM populations in the 1990s in

¹⁰⁵ Thus Kipling constantly reminds his reader that despite Kim's exceptional acculturation to India, deep-seated masculine characteristics like boldness and fortitude evince the core of his white lineage; and Lawrence, whose project seems most involved with transformations of the self, nevertheless insists that he "could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only." Cited in Boone, "Vacation Cruises: Or, The Homoerotics of Orientalism," 57.

¹⁰⁶ William J. Spurlin, "The Gender and Queer Politics of Translation: New Approaches." *Comparative Literature Studies* 51, 2 (2014): 213.

¹⁰⁷ Brad Epps, "Retos, Riesgos, Pautas y Promesas De La Teoría Queer," *Revista Iberoamericana* LXXIV, 225 (2008): 897-920.

¹⁰⁸ Naisargi N. Dave, *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

order to make them legible to public health initiatives around HIV/AIDS.¹⁰⁹ In fact, the entire volume of essays collected by William Leap and Tom Boellstorff discusses adopted, domesticated, and indigenous terms for sexuality the world over.¹¹⁰

The turn to “trans” identities, despite an assumed affinity with border crossing, does not necessarily sidestep these issues of translation. Part of that difficulty comes from the different perspectives on identity brought to bear by those who observe trans practices and those who live them. As Benjamin Sifuentes-Jáuregui suggests, from the outside “transvestism is about representing the other” and “occupying the place of the other,” whereas for the practitioner “transvestism is about representing the self” and “becoming the self.”¹¹¹ That is, the inside and outside of trans practice itself constitutes a failure of translation. In a later work, Sifuentes-Jáuregui considers regional difference more specifically in relation to “trans” practices through the idiom of translation. Calling on Said’s warnings about the non-universality of “traveling theory,” Sifuentes-Jáuregui suggests that the “capaciousness” of Euro-American version of queerness has allowed it to overwrite the specificity of Latin American and US Latino queer experience.¹¹² Most arguments that take issue with such “capaciousness” tend to claim that indigenous terms for sexual and gender diversity are necessary because they are *more specific* than the seemingly ever-expanding term “queer,” as in the case of the Hindi term *kothi* as traced by Lawrence Cohen. Vek Lewis, however, suggests that the term *travestí* is actually much *more* flexible than its English counterparts.¹¹³ by contrasting uses of *travestí* against seeming cognates like “transvestite” and “transgender” [*transgénero*], which are not merely less resonant (as in the cases presented by Epps or Dave), but also do not accurately illuminate connections many Latin Americans perceive between sexual and gender. These connections, as we shall see, are particularly salient for d’Halmar.

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence Cohen. “The Kothi Wars: AIDS Cosmopolitanism and the Morality of Classification.” Adams, Vincanne, and Stacy Leigh Pigg, eds. *Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality, and Morality in Global Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 269–303.

¹¹⁰ William Leap and Tom Boellstorff, eds. *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Language* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

¹¹¹ Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin American Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 3.

¹¹² Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *The Avowal of Difference: Queer Latino American Narratives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 214.

¹¹³ Vek Lewis, *Crossing Sex and Gender in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7.

Finally, debates about the potential “translatability” of queer experience are imbricated with important questions about the potential for both solidarity and oppression that the establishment of a transnational queer identity seems to entail. Does affiliation with a broader collective serve to protect vulnerable sexual minorities in areas that might be hostile to them, or does their inclusion merely bolster queer-identified people in the global North without requiring anything of them in return? Paola Arboleda Ríos suggests that Chilean writer and performer Pedro Lemebel – famous for his work on Chilean *travestí* and *loca* communities – rejected the appellation of “gay” or “queer” precisely because the solidarity implied in those terms was betrayed by the actual political relations of North American and Chilean upper and middle class queer-identified people with racial and social “others” engaged in the same practices.¹¹⁴

The problem these studies diagnose – how shall we name ourselves in order to be true to our history *and* recognizable to each other? – is dramatized in Miraji and d’Halmar’s practices of self-naming and genealogical claiming, described below in “What’s in a name?” Even within the Euro-American context, seminal scholars in the field such as Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick have argued over the way re-naming can trouble lines of gender and sexual identification.¹¹⁵ While queer regionalist theories often present gender and sexuality

¹¹⁴ Interestingly, while the Chilean port city of Valparaíso acts as the space of queer awakening and the initial location of potential transnational queer solidarities for d’Halmar, the same location as a space of transnational trade makes it a space of queer abuse for Lemebel: a place where Northern “queer” identified men play an essential role in the AIDS epidemic that is decimating the local community of gender and sexual minority groups. Paula Arboleda Ríos, “¿Ser o estar ‘queer’ en Latinoamérica? el devenir emancipador en: Lemebel, Perlongher y Arenas.” *Íconos: Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 39 (2011): 111–121.

¹¹⁵ In *Disidentifications*, José Muñoz offers a masterful interpretation of the polemic between Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick about the writing of Willa Cather, and the way she used naming to waver in her identification between male and female, lesbian and gay man. Muñoz then uses “the tensions that exist between cross-identification as it is theorized in Sedgwick’s essay and Butler’s response” to shape his own category of “disidentification,” which “as a mode of understanding the movements and circulations of identificatory force, would always foreground that lost object of identification” (30). From Muñoz and his reading of Sedgwick and Butler, the present chapter retains the idea that Miraji and d’Halmar’s “trans-cultural” identifications are never “fully achieved or finally reached at the expense of the points from which it emanates” (ibid). At the same time, however, Muñoz’s more specific application of Disidentification to performances of essentialized cultural otherness in the context of minority racial status in the United States are not an easy fit for the lived performance of Miraji and d’Halmar (which took place primarily for an audience in which they were a cultural majority). They may be more profitably explored in the fiction writing of Severo Sarduy, discussed in chapter four. José Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

as “untranslatables” (following Emily Apter), we might get further by following Gayatri Gopinathan in her identification of queer diasporic identification as “the impossible.” Following José Rabasa’s exploration of “utopian horizon of alternative rationalities,” Gopinathan embraces “the impossible” in order to suggest “the range of oppositional practices, subjectivities, and alternative visions of collectivity that fall outside the developmental narratives of colonialism, bourgeois nationalism, mainstream liberal feminism, and mainstream gay and lesbians politics and theory.”¹¹⁶

In her affirmation of the utopian thinking behind this identification, Gopinathan’s analysis here dovetails with Leela Gandhi’s work on sexuality and anticolonial thought among English radicals of the *fin de siècle*. In *Affective Communities*, Gandhi suggests that the shared imaginary of homosexual identity across cultures is not only possible, but desirable as a potential site of anticolonial resistance. These radicals embraced a “homosexual politics” that arose less from “dissident sex acts” and more from “a radical reconfiguration of association, alliance, relationality, community...[a] capacity for radical kinship.”¹¹⁷ Conceiving of homosexuality as a means of “radical kinship,” in turn, associates with Sara Ahmed’s idea of “queer genealogy” which “would take the very ‘affects’ of mixing, or coming into contact with things that reside on different lines, as opening up new kinds of connections.”¹¹⁸

In sum, while these projects are all dedicated to exploring the queer experiences of specific cultures and times, they share an understanding of queerness itself as a category that may be uniquely adept at boundary crossing. In what follows, I trace the “oppositional practices, subjectivities, and alternative visions of collectivity” that unite Miraji and d’Halmar’s in a “trans” practice. These imaginaries of alliance based on sexual and gender

¹¹⁶ Of her adoption of “the impossible,” Gopinathan writes, “It may initially appear incongruous to begin a study of gender, sexuality, and migration in the South Asian diaspora with an evocation of an indigenous peasant struggle in southern Mexico.” This kind of “incongruous” connection, of course, is precisely the type celebrated by queer utopian projects like those undertaken by the two authors at the center of this chapter. It is, moreover, precisely the kind of “engaged” methodological choice that typifies the role for scholars in cartographies of engagement. Finally, Gopinath’s gesture of inclusion toward Rabassa’s work here counters the general tendency of South Asianist scholars to ignore contributions to Subaltern Studies from the Latin American context. Gayatri Gopinathan, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 19.

¹¹⁷ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 36.

¹¹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 154.

identity, like the political imaginaries that arose around the Cold War in the previous chapter, might thus be seen as likewise recovering the “radical kinship” and “new kinds of connections.”

WHAT’S IN A NAME? *SEUDÓNIMO*, *TAKHALLUS*, AND ALTERNATIVE LINEAGES

This first close reading section examines the way each author used his pen name-- *seudónimo* in Spanish and *takhallus* in Urdu, to – to reject his natal family, region and religion, in favor of a set of connections predicated on “trans-ing” across several identity borders at once.

There is a broad agreement that d’Halmar’s pseudonym carried an unusually heavy symbolic cargo, but the exact nature of that cargo is a matter of debate. His contemporaries thought the transition from Thompson to d’Halmar marked his evolution from naturalist to exoticist, dating from d’Halmar’s departure to India. But d’Halmar had already been using a version of that name to co-write a book with his close friend Fernando Santivan.¹¹⁹ According to Sylvia Molloy, this makes the name “d’Halmar” the author’s first “queer fiction,” a way for him to solemnize his bond with Santivan by mirroring the adoption of common surnames in heterosexual marriage. Seeing the pen name primarily as a sexual connection, however, fails to account for its familial symbolism, and the “trans” sense in which its bearer most frequently came to use it.

Publically, d’Halmar associated his pen name with his grandfather, an erstwhile Swedish mariner of noble heritage.¹²⁰ Yet the grandfather is an explicit fiction; d’Halmar does not even claim to be a genetic descendant of such a person, but rather the reincarnation of the same soul. Other Latin American authors of the era used reincarnation to sanitize homosexual relationships for their audiences, so that attraction between two men was mediated through a reincarnated female soul.¹²¹ D’Halmar, on the other hand,

¹¹⁹ Silvia Molloy, “Of Queens and Castanets,” in *Queer Diasporas*, ed. Cindy Patton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 110.

¹²⁰ Despite having what is, for a Hispanic name, quite idiosyncratic spelling, “d’Halmar” when pronounced aloud clearly forms the Spanish phrase “de al mar,” i.e., “from the sea.” D’Halmar amplifies this significance through his focus in *La sombra* and *Nirvana* on mariners (marineros) and travellers (viajeros). Jaime Galgani, citing René de Costa, in conversation with the author, July 22, 2013.

¹²¹ See, for example, Amado Nervo’s *El donador de almas* [*The Soul Giver*] or Alejandro Tapia y Rivera *Póstumo el transmigrado* [*Posthumous, the Reincarnated One*].

imagined reincarnation as an alternative to heterosexual reproduction. Through reincarnation, the fictional grandfather could pass down his inborn traits directly to d'Halmar, notably including his "rareza," or queerness.¹²² Importantly, this conception of reincarnation as a technology of reproduction also allowed d'Halmar to claim cross-cultural ties to an international legion of queer men separated over space and time. In the three books d'Halmar wrote about his sojourn in India, he invoked the concept of reincarnation in order to connect both romantically *and* fraternally with men in Asia and the Middle East. A minor character from *La sombra del humo en el espejo* [*The Shadow of Smoke in the Mirror*], the Bengali doctor Chandria-Gosh, explains these connections in the following way:

For those of us who believe in the theory of karma everything is so simple. Your America, from the dominion of the Aztecs to the dominion of the Incas, was it not, perhaps, according to archeologists, the birthplace of Egypt? You yourself and he [d'Halmar's Indian lover], are you certain that you were not a pair of twins – who knows what sex—or a pair of ideal lovers, in another simultaneous existence?¹²³

It is evident that d'Halmar's first-hand exposure to Hindu religious practice while living in Calcutta pointed his use of reincarnation away from the strictly sexual and toward this other direction. This is clearest in *Mi otro yo* [*My Other Self*], the least studied of his three India novels. *My Other Self* is the only explicitly fictional account, the only one with a heterosexual romance plot, and the only one whose protagonist is not named 'd'Halmar.' These freedoms from the constraints of d'Halmar's own, publicly known biography allow him to play out fantasies about lineage that are much clearer than in the other two "nonfiction" texts. Even through the trans-technology of his *seudónimo*, d'Halmar could not lay claim to an entirely different origin story, one that would more than tangentially relate him to South Asia, but in *My Other Self*, d'Halmar actually arranges for his protagonist, the mariner Miguel Orth, to be born in India. In a move that will be explored more fully in the

¹²² I use this translation of "rareza" advisedly, since it was and continues to be a code word for homosexuality in Latin American Spanish. Augusto d'Halmar, "Cristián y yo," in *Obras Escogidas* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andres Bello, 1970), 278.

¹²³ Augusto D'Halmar, "La sombra del humo en el espejo," in *Obras Escogidas* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andres Bello, 1970), 542. Ellipses original.

“Disappearing Acts” section of this chapter, d’Halmar conjures a matching set of engraved talismans for Orth, one bestowed as a sort of baptism in Madras shortly after his birth, the other discovered upon his return to India as a young man. The talismans reinforce Orth’s transnational identity, encouraging the audience and the other characters to look *beyond* his phenotype and recognize his native connection to India. They therefore echo the operation of reincarnation in the other two books, allowing Orth to forge interethnic, transnational bonds with other characters in the novel. Significantly, although there are queer themes in *My Other Self*, they are much subtler than in the other two novels, while themes of interethnic connection and reincarnation remain. This suggests that d’Halmar’s use of Indian locations and themes extends beyond his pursuit of sexual permission, in contradistinction to the arguments offered by Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Molloy.

Unlike d’Halmar, Miraji did not have a choice about writing under a pen name, or *takhallus*—it is a formal requirement for entering the field of Urdu poetry. While a pseudonym is sometimes clever or significant, a *takhallus* is always charged with additional symbolic value. Even so, the stories around Miraji’s particular are one of the most famous parts of his personal legend. As a student in Lahore, Miraji became enamored of a Bengali girl named Mira Sen. In various versions of the story, Miraji is either explicitly rejected by Mira or otherwise never even gets up the courage to approach her. In all these versions however, Miraji subsequently becomes obsessed with Mira Sen and, finding it impossible to form a real relationship with her, absorbs her identity into himself through a change of name and even, in some accounts, wardrobe.¹²⁴ Here Miraji used his *takhallus* to forge a fictional romantic relationship with another living person, in the same way that d’Halmar used his name to connect himself with Fernando Santiván.

Yet for Miraji, too, the significance of his pen name changes over time. In his memorial essay for Miraji, “Three Balls,” Manto compares the *takhallus* to clay on a potter’s wheel: at first Miraji attempted to recreate Mira Sen exactly in his own mind, but as time wore on overwork made her distinguishing features muddled and the mind that envisioned them ambiguous. He writes that as Mira Sen’s image faded, she was replaced in Miraji’s symbolic system “by the grace of his name” with the medieval north Indian poetess Mirabai,

¹²⁴ Patel, *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings*, 44-46.

whom he was translating obsessively at the time of his death.¹²⁵ Like others in the bhakti tradition, Mirabai focused her poetry on her desire for union with god, in her case the Krishna avatar of Vishnu. In her poems, Mirabai balances her adoption of the specific alternate persona as a pining lover—one of Krishna’s cowherd consorts—and a vision of an unbounded self totally at one with god. Perhaps this ambivalence appealed to Miraji, who was also torn between Mira Sen as a particular alter-ego and the notion of complete personal dissolution.

When Miraji writes his autobiographical sketch, “Something about myself” [*kuch apne bare men*] he, like Manto, highlights his association to Mirabai, although in his own accounting his claim to her was established in the same way as Miguel Orth’s claim on Indian identity: as a product of the place where he was born.¹²⁶ Though neither Manto nor Miraji invokes “reincarnation” as a justification for Miraji’s affinity with Mirabai, his attempts to build a non-genetic lineage between himself and the bhakti poet clearly reflect the way that d’Halmar uses that concept. Miraji’s invocation of multiple, contradictory line of allegiance in the beginning of this sketch—Kashmiri heritage, Punjabi birth place, Urdu language and a mixture of Eastern and Western literary influences—also serves to unsettle the primacy of a single genetic lineage through which other identity markers would naturally flow.

In a second essay entitled “Regarding my verses,” Miraji suggests more concretely how his personal romantic history and his lineage combine within his *takhallus*. In order to understand one’s present personality, he insists, it is essential to look to the past. Because his own ancestors were compelled to travel East and South out of Central Asia into India, he sees his own journey from Lahore to Delhi and then Mumbai as a recapitulation of their migrations. Since his ancestors were conquerors in India, his attempt at romantic conquest with Mira Sen is a recapitulation of their battles, but one that he is destined to lose. “The combination of this defeat with my racial memory is the struggle that gave me my name and has become associated with my work,” he explains.¹²⁷ Finding himself trapped in Mira Sen’s

¹²⁵ Saadat Hasan Manto, “Tin Gole,” in *Miraji: Shakhsiyyat Aur Fann*, ed. Kumar Pashi (Delhi: Modern Publishing House, 1981), 65.

¹²⁶ Miraji, “Kuch Apne Bare Men,” in *Miraji: Shakhsiyyat Aur Fann*, ed. Kumar Pashi (Delhi: Modern Publishing House, 1981).

¹²⁷ Miraji, “Apne Nazamon Ke Bare Mein,” n.d.

Hindu past rather than his own Muslim one, Miraji continues, he took solace in the Krishna stories that Mirabai makes famous in her songs. In these two essays, we see the same transition away from a conception of the *takhallus* as a romantic bond and toward its use as a tool of alternative lineage building. Patel also emphasizes that by claiming another artist as part of his lineage, Miraji may have been laying claim to certain South Asian genres and lexicons otherwise marginalized within the Urdu canon.

One very obvious difference between the kinds of transvestism employed by these authors is that Miraji crosses lines of gender while d'Halmar crosses lines of culture. This reading, however, ignores the way that gender is implicated in d'Halmar's conception of global homosexual identity, and the way that cross-cultural borrowing is implicated in Miraji's choice of female role models. In fact, d'Halmar constantly invokes gender androgyny as the physical marker of sympathy between himself, his grandfather, and the multiple lovers he meets in his journeys through Asia. Because this quality of androgyny is geographically pervasive, moreover, it does not necessarily perpetuate colonialist associations between effeminacy and ethnic otherness. Miraji's crossing seem to foreground gender, but in fact is equally notable for the way it cross religious and linguistic lines: Mira Sen and Mirabai are *Hindu* women speaking Bangla and Braj Bhasha respectively. Indeed, one of the most notable changes that Miraji undergoes after changing his *takhallus* is to begin wearing a *mala* or string of Hindu prayer beads. In a political moment particularly invested with solidifying divisions between Hindu and Muslim—linguistically, geographically, and culturally—the fact that Miraji lays claim to cross-cultural models and border-blurring language becomes particularly significant.

ADAPTATION: ACTS OF TRANSLATION AND SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

This section will examine *translation* as a practice that straddles the border between *transgenic* claims on lineage and *transvestite* claims on transcendence. D'Halmar and Miraji are hardly the only authors from formerly colonized countries to claim European literature as part of their artistic lineage. Yet there is something that makes Miraji and d'Halmar's practice of translation, especially as a tool for artistic lineage building, more *trans* than others. Their translations also enact physical migrations for the authors they cite, rather than merely their language.

If we compare the *geographic* translations each author made of writing from French we may see how it facilitates a different kind of claim on Europe as a cultural center. We then turn to another Latin American queer author who traveled to India, the Cuban novelist and philosopher Severo Sarduy, whose own reference to French theoretical work straddles the same border between what we might call “straight” and “queer” styles of translation. Focusing specifically on Sarduy’s reworking of Lacan’s “The Line and Light” in *La simulación* [*Simulation*], I show how Sarduy lays claim to his own interpretation of Lacan through an act of geographic translation similar to those imagined by Miraji and d’Halmar. I then demonstrate how his particular interpretation of “Lacan contradicts many other interpretations of mimicry and transvestism mentioned previously and offers a better model for the two “trans” figures at hand.

D’Halmar’s writing has always been haunted by the specter of originality. His most famous novel was an explicit retelling of Zola’s work, while many of the ‘exoticist’ period show a clear debt to Pierre Loti, among others. This would seem sufficient textual evidence to suggest, as Molloy does, that in his writing about India d’Halmar is merely “affecting the conventional attitudes of Eurocentric Orientalism.”¹²⁸ In order to make the distinction between d’Halmar and his European models more clear, it is important to assess precisely how and why he habitually “translated” European models into his own writing.

Loebell has a compelling theory on this account. In an unpublished article, he suggests that d’Halmar translated *Naná* geographically as well as linguistically in order to change the reception of Zola’s novel. *Naná* had already been translated into Spanish and was something of a hit with the Chilean elite when d’Halmar wrote *Juana Lucero*. What d’Halmar diagnosed and then sought to remedy, according to Loebell, was the fact that Chileans read Zola as the latest trend from Paris, and conveniently missed its social critique. When the same plot was explicitly re-staged in their own country, that critique was impossible to ignore.¹²⁹

D’Halmar’s writing on India reflects a similar logic of translation. The influence of European writers, especially Loti, is incontrovertible; the task remaining to the critic is to hypothesize the meaning of the gaps between model and the work it inspires. If d’Halmar’s

¹²⁸ Silvia Molloy, “Of Queens and Castanets,” 119.

¹²⁹ Ricardo Loebell, in conversation with the author, August 15, 2013.

reworking of these European authors is a way to lay claim to that artistic lineage, that end never *totalizes* his project. To this point, Galgani notes that d’Halmar’s writing on India similarly diverges in particular places from Loti, especially regarding his openness to the dissolution of self.¹³⁰

D’Halmar’s sort of geographic translation, or what we might term a “vernacularization” of a given plot into the local culture, was not unheard of in Latin American writing of the period. But it is much more characteristic of early twentieth century Indian writing in Hindi. Munshi Premchand’s rewriting of *Silas Marner* in *Sukhdas* comes to mind immediately. In roughly the same period, Miraji was well known as a translator of both European and Asian literature. As in d’Halmar’s case, Miraji’s translation was often tied to projects of lineage building, not only for himself but for South Asian literature in general. This is clearest in his translations of pre-modern writing in Maithili and Braj Bhasha, two alternative regional dialects to Modern Standard, Khari boli Hindi. By reintroducing these texts to Urdu-speaking audiences, Miraji resisted trends to “purify” both Hindi and Urdu through the jettisoning of a diverse linguistic heritage.

Miraji’s translation of European authors has a similar aim of making space for them in Urdu’s literary memory. Like many authors in the global periphery, Miraji found himself caught between seemingly opposite goals: to affirm, on the one hand, the unique value of his own culture and language – speaking back to Macaulay’s challenge in the Minute on Education, which states that all of Asian literature is equivalent to a single shelf in the vast library of European thought – while still claiming, on the other hand, the right to draw inspiration from European sources. Miraji’s essay on Charles Baudelaire uses a unique strategy of geographic translation to propose a novel solution to this tension.

Miraji opens the essay in a fairly standard vein, offering Baudelaire as a creative alternative to the particular strains of realism and progressivism (*haqiqat parastī, tarīqī pasand*) that have taken hold of South Asian literature.¹³¹ These terms refer specifically to literature produced by the Progressive Writers Association, to which Faiz has usually been

¹³⁰ Jaime Galgani, in conversation with the author, July 22, 2013.

¹³¹ Miraji, “Charles Baudelaire,” in *Miraji: Shakhsiyyat Aur Fann*, ed. Kumar Pashi (Delhi: Modern Publishing House, 1981), 124.

associated and Miraji is often held up as an antagonist. For Miraji, Baudelaire could act as a corrective to their obsessive focus on social issues.

Yet the most interesting part of the Baudelaire essay is the wholesale geographic translation of the author to India, such that *Flowers of Evil* is always already a book of Indian poetry whose influence is the legitimate right of Indian authors. Miraji suggests this subtly within the first paragraphs of the essay when he compares the atmosphere of Baudelaire's poetry to the smoke of the cremation ground.¹³² He could have easily likened it to a graveyard, which would fit not only Baudelaire's original French context, but a South Asian Muslim context as well. Instead, he chooses a Hindu reference that unmistakably anchors Baudelaire's poetry in India while reinforcing Miraji's own religious and cultural fluidity. Later in the essay, this geographic translation comes to the fore.

As Geeta Patel explores at length, Miraji recounts an episode in Baudelaire's life in which he takes up residence in Calcutta. In an experience not unlike d'Halmar's, Baudelaire is described as being literally and figuratively infected by India, which transforms his entire worldview and subsequent aesthetic project. The only difference is that while d'Halmar's India journey is, to varying degrees, authentic, Baudelaire's is an outright fiction by the Urdu poet.¹³³ Patel understands this essay as a recapitulation of Miraji's own formative experiences. Certainly there is truth to this: for instance, elsewhere in his writing, Bengal seems to stand metonymically for Mira Sen, and thus Baudelaire's encounter with an intense and destructive sexuality in Calcutta fits within that narrative.¹³⁴ What this biographical reading leaves out, it seems, is the *intellectual* and *cultural* claims Miraji makes on Baudelaire as a legitimate source of inspiration for Indian writers. Through different means than d'Halmar, he achieves the same end of demanding that a foreign text speak to his native context.

What d'Halmar and Miraji do with fiction and poetry, Severo Sarduy does with Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in the opening to his book of essays *Simulation* [*La Simulación*]. Sarduy, whose fictional work I analyze as a primary source in chapter four, moved from Cuba to France as a young man and there became heavily involved with the

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Patel, *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings*, 161-162.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

theoretical group *Tel Quel*. He subsequently traveled to India, whose landscape and religious traditions left an indelible mark on the rest of his life and writing career. In a moment I will illustrate how Sarduy's chapter "copy/simulacrum" offers an alternative reading of mimicry that more aptly describes the "trans" practice of Miraji and d'Halmar. But first I want to pause to show how, through a similar act of geographic translation, Sarduy makes a parallel indigenizing claim on Lacan in a project that otherwise adheres closely to its model.

La simulación hovers somewhere between a translation and an elaboration of Lacan's "Of the Gaze as Petit Object a." The essay is divided between regular chapters of theory and thematically related personal reflections set off in italics. Although there are also important innovations on Lacan's theories within the "straight" chapter discussed below, the italicized portions are more explicitly original, and more explicitly queer. Immediately preceding the theoretical section "copy/simulacrum," Sarduy evokes a memory from his childhood in the backwaters of Cuba, the first time he attended a drag show. Readers familiar with Sarduy will recognize the *travestí* from many of his fictional texts, as well as the cheap, bright, and fragile world of cellophane artifice that she inhabits. His fascination with this artifice of *pacotilla* – detritus, junk, kitsch – is essential to both his idea of transvestism and, later, his understanding of India (see chapter four). Yet here, it is also clearly a marker of the underdevelopment and cultural particularity of Cuba, ironically refracted in the cheap Cuban imitation of Asia through "kimonos," "pagodas" and "lacquered chairs" that are part of the performance space. The preface thus sets up an implicit opposition to the world in which Lacan developed his body of work, without interrupting Sarduy's performance of fidelity to Lacan's theories in the "straight" space of the neatly bracketed theoretical section. At the same time, the personal account conditions the reader to accept Sarduy's interpretation when he begins to reformulate Lacan's "The line and light" in an unexpected direction, one that will open up an alternative mode of understanding the transvestite acts of our two main authors.

Many of the scholars who work on cross-cultural transvestite figures make some reference to Lacan as the theoretical backing of their models. Sometimes they take recourse to Lacan directly, as in the cases of Garber and McClintock, but more often they do so with reference to Homi Bhabha's interpretation of Lacan's "The line and light" in his much-cited

essay "Of Mimicry and Man."¹³⁵ In particular, the same passage of "The line and light" that Sarduy explores in depth in "copy/simulacrum" also serves as the epigraph for Bhabha's essay. "Of Mimicry and Man" has been enduringly valuable for the way it allows scholars to specify the stakes of cross-cultural transvestism as a tool of colonialism. Yet Bhabha's theories, written to describe vertical relations between colonizer and colonized, are not always easily adaptable to the more complicated relationship between people from various parts of the global south. Because Bhabha and Sarduy both develop their theories of mimicry from the same small section Lacan's writing, Sarduy's very different conclusions may be used to offer a rebuttal to the invocation of "Of Mimicry and Man" to analyze the cross-cultural transvestism of the two authors at hand.

In that small section of "The line and light," Lacan opens his consideration of mimicry with a fairly straightforward question: "how important is adaptation in mimicry?"¹³⁶ Adaptation is meant here in an evolutionary sense, those things which develop in order to help an organism survive and propagate itself. Lacan, considering mimicry in the realm of biological theories offered by Roger Caillois, concludes cryptically that mimicry is *not* primarily adaptive, but is at best "inoperant" and in some cases even seems to work "in the opposite direction" from adaptation.¹³⁷ Here Lacan changes course, leaving the potent suggestion that mimicry is anti-adaptive undeveloped.

"Copy/Simulacrum" fills in this gap in Lacan's original lecture. Drawing on a wider array of biological research than either Bhabha or Lacan, Sarduy returns to Caillois in greater detail to argue that the instinct to mimic in animal life far exceeds its effectiveness as a survival strategy. Instead, for Sarduy the instinct to mimicry is a death drive, exemplified by the transvestite. "The transvestite-animal does not seek an agreeable appearance in order to attract (or a disagreeable appearance to dissuade) but rather an

¹³⁵ Indeed, part of McClintock's theoretical project is to read Bhabha into Garber, whose book *Vested Interests* comes slightly too early to feel the influence of his work directly. McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 62-64.

¹³⁶ Jacques Lacan, "Of the Gaze as Petit Object a," in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 98.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 99.

incorporation of stillness in order to *disappear*.”¹³⁸ Instead of defining camouflage as something that *protects* presence (in Bhabha’s reading), Sarduy translates the literal ability to disappear into one’s environs as a psychological drive toward self-annihilation.

Yet self-annihilation in *La simulación* is not merely an evolutionary drive, but also cultural and spiritual pursuit. In addition to its debts to Lacan and Caillois, the reference to “stillness,” or more precisely “arrestedness” [*fijeza*] cited above allies *La simulación* with the Cuban author José Lezama Lima, one of Sarduy’s mentors and part of his own queer literary genealogy. César Salgado explains that “poetic gnosis in Lezama arises out of a shift between contrasting states[...] from kinesis to stasis,” and thus the idea of “arrestedness” in Lezama’s writing affects “the separation of being from becoming,” to provoke poetic epiphany.¹³⁹ The transvestite’s performance, which produces arrestedness and thus sets up the conditions for epiphany, is what Sarduy calls “hypertelic” [*hipertélico*]. As Sifuentes-Jáuregui suggests, a “hyper-telos” entails a movement beyond a “desired limit” [*telos*] to a place where desire itself is annihilated.¹⁴⁰ Taken together, then, we can see how Sarduy constructs transvestism as a set of practices that evacuates the self, overcomes desire, and thereby sets up the conditions for epiphany.

It is perhaps thus unsurprising that Sarduy connects this vision of transvestism with what he terms “Eastern” philosophies. “In the East we encounter, at the center of its great theologies... not a full presence, God, man, logos, but *a creative void whose metaphor and simulation is the visible world*, the true experience and comprehension of which constitutes liberation.”¹⁴¹ For Sarduy, “corporeal work” [*trabajo corporal*] — performing religious austerities and meditating, but equally applying makeup and dressing in drag—is the means by which one may gain “true comprehension” of the simulated nature of the world and

¹³⁸ “El animal-travestí no busca una apariencia amable para atraer (ni una apariencia desagradable para desuadir), sino una incorporación de la fijeza para desaparecer.” Severo Sarduy, *Obras III: Ensayos*. 1st ed. (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013), 233.

¹³⁹ César A. Salgado, *From Modernism to Neobaroque: Joyce and Lezama Lima* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 51, 75.

¹⁴⁰ Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *The Avowal of Difference*, 186.

¹⁴¹ “En el Oriente encontramos, en el centro de las grandes teogonías... no una presencia ... sino una vacuidad germinadora cuya metáfora y simulación es la realidad visible....” Sarduy, *Obras III: Ensayos*, 237. Emphasis original.

achieve liberation.¹⁴² Sarduy therefore associates the annihilation of self that he believes is inherent in any transvestite act with the pursuit of *moksha* (Hinduism), *nirvana* (Buddhism) or *fanā* (Sufi Islam), the release from worldly desire and the attainment of divine understanding predicated on the dissolution of the personal ego. In the following section, I will suggest that Sarduy's Lacanian translation of South Asian religious principles is more useful for understanding the motivations behind of Miraji and d'Halmar's cross-cultural mimicry than the theories offered by Garber, Roy, McClintock or Bhabha.

DISAPPEARING ACTS: SELF-ERASURE IN BORROWED CLOTHES

I opened this piece by recounting the life-threatening illness that truncated d'Halmar's stay in Calcutta. That illness had two main symptoms, each of which may be read symbolically in opposing directions. The first was a fever, which Loebell understands as mode of purification allowing d'Halmar to burn off the Indian influence that has infiltrated his Western body.¹⁴³ That reading, in effect, restores d'Halmar to Western ideas of Indian identity as a bodily contagion. D'Halmar's peeling skin, on the other hand, suggests that the effect of India is a reincarnation, transacted at the literal level of the *carne*, or flesh. This reading, I will argue, is corroborated by d'Halmar's consistent emphasis on the identity effects of changes wrought on bodily surface, his lifelong fascination with disguise. Having established how disguise functions for d'Halmar in the South Asian context, I will turn to the parallels in Miraji's more fully realized transformations.

The journey to India was always a location of transformation for d'Halmar. Indeed, the very title *Mi otro yo* is explicitly named for an alternative self, while he opens *Nirvana* by explaining that he wished to "shake up a self that had become too monotonous."¹⁴⁴ Even before he left for India, Molloy notes, d'Halmar had developed a penchant for playing dress up in other clothes and identities, but these games took on a new urgency in the light of his South Asian sojourn.¹⁴⁵ In *Nirvana*, d'Halmar wrote in depth about his own appearance in

¹⁴² These corporeal labors "are nothing more than the apparent frontiers of a limitless metamorphosis" [no son más que las fronteras aparentes de una metamorfosis sin límites]. Cited in Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *The Avowal of Difference*, 186.

¹⁴³ Ricardo Loebell, in conversation with the author, August 20, 2013.

¹⁴⁴ "Augusto D'Halmar, *Nirvana (cuaderno de bitácora) viajes Por Occidente, Oriente y Extremo Oriente* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Ercilla, 1935), 1.

¹⁴⁵ Silvia Molloy, "Of Queens and Castanets," 120.

Indian dress, suggesting that his entire sense of self was being overtaken and erased by this change of clothes, something he both feared and intensely desired. Thus d'Halmar presents several scenes in which a threat to his autonomous self is preceded by a description of the way his body has been transformed by India: the tanned face, no longer as white as the white turban above it, the hyper-lush mustache, the intensely red-stained lips, and Asian garb: "a robe" and "linen turban."¹⁴⁶

Miguel Orth's twin talismans, described in "What's in a name," produce a similar effect. Bequeathed to him by an itinerant Buddhist monk, almost from birth Orth had worn a copper medallion stamped with the initials OMPH (*Om Mani Padme Hum*). When he returns to India as a young man, Orth encounters a merchant with an opal ring set in copper that has been imprinted with the same initials. Orth approaches this evidence of his Indian heritage with a combination of horror and intense desire. The opal is described as sinister in both color and tone, likened to poison. He feels compelled to trade a much more valuable stone to secure it, and yet he is certain it will bring bad luck. The merchant assures him the opposite is true: "Among Orientals, *sahib*... the opal is, on the contrary, an ornament that brings vitality."¹⁴⁷ As with the turban and mustache, Orth's acceptance of the opal, then, represents the exchange of one embodied semiotic system for another.

Finally, it is essential to return to the life threatening illness that provides the climax in *Nirvana*, *The Shadow* and *My Other Self*. In the former two, the illness is of dramatic interest primarily for its ability to emotionally unite the protagonist with his male servant/love interest. Because homoerotic tensions are submerged in *My Other Self* compared to the more autobiographical works, the focus of the dramatic arc of his illness shifts onto more individual transformations. D'Halmar writes extensively about the sloughing skin that characterizes his illness, sometimes likening it to clothing, especially gloves or socks. The same Chandria Gosh who, as a medical doctor, waxed poetic on reincarnation as a technology of connection in *La sombra*, here, as a doctor of esoteric philosophy, explains how Orth's very literal change of skin implies an equivalent death and rebirth as a new person.

¹⁴⁶ D'Halmar, *Nirvana*, 148.

¹⁴⁷ "Entre Orientales, *sahib*... el ópalo es al contrario prenda segura de vida." D'Halmar, "Mi otro yo: de la doble vida en India," *La lámpara en el molino* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Ecrilla, 1935), 83.

“Something of yourself will stay in this land where you have sloughed off your used covering, and in the fresh one with which you have wrapped yourself again, although you did not expect it, you take along something of India with you”

[...]

Miguel considered [...] Yes, the teacher was in the right. Every cycle of our life ends with our own death and reincarnation.¹⁴⁸

Miraji demonstrates a much more powerful will to self-eradication through imitation and disguise. In “Something About Myself,” Miraji foregrounds a deviant sense of his own sexual desire as the root of his creative endeavors, something that Patel and others have investigated more fully. Despite this framing, however, what Miraji seems most concerned with in the text itself is not sex but clothing. In a much-cited passage, Miraji locates his sexual awakening in a brief scene from his youth in which a pubescent girl accidentally exposes herself to him. Yet the scene itself, in Miraji’s retelling, is one in which clothing takes primacy.

The sun suddenly glimmered through the *veil of her clothing* and outlined the delicate body inside. This stolen vision, dissolved from deep inside the earth, has come to inhabit my life and poetry in many forms – *as clothing*.¹⁴⁹

Indeed, a truly stunning portion of this purportedly autobiographical work is dedicated to matters of women’s dress. Miraji muses on *saris* and *lehengas*, two types of women’s clothing, as well as a collection of citations from his own poetry that use clothing as a metaphor for different aspects of existence. “And humans, too, are only clothing,” he writes, “nothing but a veil.”¹⁵⁰ Far from exhausting his store of clothing-related anecdotes, moreover, Miraji insists “one could find many more examples of this type” in his *oeuvre*.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ “‘Algo tuyo queda en la tierra donde has desnudado tu envoltura usada, y en la fresca que has revestido, aunque no lo esperes, algo indio te llevas’... Miguel pensaba ... Sí, el maestro estaba en lo justo. Cada ciclo de nuestra vida se cierra con una muerte y un renacimiento de nosotros mismos.” Ibid, 117.

¹⁴⁹ Patel, *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings*, 41. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁰ “Aur insān bhī malbūs, purdah hī tō hai.” Miraji, “Kuch Apne Bare Men,” 468.

¹⁵¹ “Aur is qasam kī aur bahut sī misālen mil saktīn hain.” Ibid.

"Humans, too, are only clothing." This passage intensely recalls Sarudy's insistence, echoing Lacan, that there is nothing beyond or underneath in transvestism. Indeed, the purpose of dress up in Miraji's life and writing is to actively evacuate the self. Just as the story of Mira Sen is the most famous referent for Miraji's *takhallus*, his embodied mode of mourning her is his most famous real-life experiment with cross-dressing as a form of self-erasure. In Manto's retelling in "Mr. Icy-Hot," Tapish, Miraji's alter ego, begins to wear women's clothing as a way of mourning the loss of his fiancée after she runs off with another man.¹⁵² This episode clearly seems to reference the loss of Mira Sen that gave Miraji his name. Nevertheless, women's clothing was only one example of Miraji's experiments with a variety of bodily adornments that could be called "cross-cultural" transvestism. Miraji is reported at various times to have dressed in heavy European garb at the height of summer, to have allowed his hair to grow long, filthy and matted like that of a Hindu ascetic, to wear prayer beads of various religious orders and to keep his facial hair in a "French cut", among many other strange and boundary-crossing bodily habits.¹⁵³ As time wore on, he also tried to attain these altered states through the consumption of spectacular quantities of alcohol and *bhang*, a drinkable form of cannabis.¹⁵⁴ All of this seemed to echo religious beliefs, both Muslim and Hindu, about the rejection or transformation of the sensory world in pursuit of oneness with the divine. Yet Miraji's practice never consistently followed these lines, nor did it neatly delineate between one religious tradition and the other. Instead, like his language use, its references were defiant in their hybridity.

CONCLUSION

Despite the strong break I asserted at the beginning of this chapter, I want to emphasize that I do not necessarily disagree with many other critics' estimations of the two authors at its heart. D'Halmar really seems to have been an Orientalist, a Europhile, and somewhat of a classist snob. Miraji, a gender-bending eccentric whose writing style tends

¹⁵² Manto, "Tapish Kashmiri," 773.

¹⁵³ For example, "Us ke gule men mōṭe mōṭe gōl munkōn [monks] kī mālā thī jis ka sirf bilaīṭhah qamīz ke khule hūe kalar [collar] se nazar āta thā. Main ne sōchā 'is insān ne apnī kya heyt-e kazaī bana rakhī hai.' Lumbe lumbe galez bāl jō gardan se nice ṭakte the. Farenc kat [French cut] si daḍhi. Mail se bhare hūe naxan. Sardiyon ke dīn thā aisā malūm hōta thā ke mahinon se us ke badun ne pāni kī shakal nahīn dekhī." Manto, "Tin Gole," 63.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 74.

somewhat toward the ambiguous and opaque. Nor do I deny that it could be appropriate to understand both authors as fitting along a queer spectrum, as indeed various “trans” designations often are understood to fit. Rather, it has always been my aim to show that within these broadly correct designations, small differences can matter a great deal to interpretation. Attending to these small differences requires us to disregard certain cultural, geographic and methodological borders that are not often crossed. In doing so, we also recreate the queer imaginaries that undergirded both author’s projects of naming, dress, and translation. If such border crossing is essential to the chapter, it follows the example of its two subjects, rather than the will of its author. Perhaps the *trans*-cultural comparison through which I have made this aspect of their work visible is one that would have pleased them both.

Chasing Your (Josie) Bliss: The Troubling Critical Afterlife of Pablo Neruda's Burmese Lover

INTRODUCTION¹⁵⁵

If we imagine all of Pablo Neruda's poetry, his manuscripts, his effects collected in various university collections and *casas-museos* and all the secondary literature about him to constitute a single archive, then it is an archive haunted by a lacuna in the shape of a Burmese woman. Josie Bliss, as she is commonly known, was purportedly Neruda's lover while he was stationed as a consular official in Burma (1927-1928), and the inspiration for several poems. Yet there is no contemporary record of her existence. Though Neruda called her any number of things, from the most beautiful woman in Mandalay [la más bella de Mandalay] to "the evil one" [la maligna], no one knows her real name. There are no photos of her, either. In a recent retrospective of Neruda's life in Asia during the writing of *Residencia en la tierra* [Residence on Earth], the Fundación Pablo Neruda in Santiago de Chile, used a Javanese mask to represent her face.



Figure 2: Photo used to represent Josie Bliss.
Courtesy of Fundación Pablo
Neruda, Santiago de Chile, 2013.

¹⁵⁵ An earlier version of this piece was published as an article in *Transmodernity: A Journal of Peripheral Culture of the Luso-Hispanic World*. Roanne Kantor, "Chasing Your (Josie) Bliss: The Troubling Critical Afterlife of Pablo Neruda's Burmese Lover," *Transmodernity*, 2 (2014): 59-82.

The mask is as apt a representation for Josie as any. Like her, it papers over an absence with the stylized illusion of presence. Neruda and generations of critics analyzing his life and work have filled reams of paper with descriptions of Josie as exotic, passionate, animalistic and homicidally jealous. Behind all these descriptions, however, is an absolute void: we lack not just the archival evidence to corroborate this particular version of Josie, but the evidence to suggest that there was ever any Josie at all.

A return to Jacques Derrida's "Archive Fever" helps us understand why scholarship on Neruda has been consistently unable to acknowledge Josie for what she is: a potentially un-fillable gap. In Derrida's original essay, the archive replete with sources creates a "compulsive, repetitive, nostalgic desire for the archive," which spurs the scholar ever deeper into its study.¹⁵⁶ Yet for a scholar to experience archive fever, he or she must eventually confront a moment of archival absence and become invested in "searching the archive right where it slips away."¹⁵⁷ Gayatri Spivak, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, speaks of her own experience of archive fever when pursuing an archival absence. Recalling earlier work in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak identifies her search for traces of the Rani of Sirmur as an inability to come to terms with the latter's absolute absence from record.¹⁵⁸ This seems to be precisely the condition in which Neruda scholars find themselves with regard to Josie, treating her absence merely as an occasion to relocate her in ever-more dubious "primary" sources, rather than as a conclusive epistemological limit. In her monograph *For the Record*, Anjali Arondekar picks up where Spivak left off, urging scholars to move away from the notion that every archival object "would somehow lead to a formulation of subjectivity: the presumption that if a body is found, then a subject can be recovered."¹⁵⁹ The present chapter departs radically from current Neruda scholarship by proceeding from the assumption that Josie Bliss is an unrecoverable subject. Following Arondekar, this chapter demonstrates how an archival absence, when acknowledged as such, can still yield productive insights about structure in which it is housed.

¹⁵⁶ Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." *Diacritics* 25, 2 (1995): 57.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 198-312.

¹⁵⁹ Arondekar, *For the Record*, 3.

Derrida also emphasizes the power of the archive to “produce” rather than merely “record” its contents.¹⁶⁰ This idea, with roots in Michel Foucault’s *The Archeology of Knowledge*, is powerfully taken up in Ann Stoler’s *Along the Archival Grain*, where she approaches to the archive as an ethnographic object, attending not as much to its individual contents as to the logics of its construction. In the case of Dutch imperial projects in Indonesia, she shows, the process of creating and maintaining the archive actually perpetuated racial categories that had a measurable impact on millions of people.¹⁶¹ It is this attention to archive as *producer* and *perpetuator* of racism from which the present work proceeds. It argues that the construction of Neruda scholarship as a self-referential archive, rather than merely Neruda’s own occasionally racist representations of South and Southeast Asia, contribute to what other scholars have named “Latin American Orientalism.” How can a focus on methodology and institutionalization based around the problematic treatment of an archival absence help us understand not only what the Neruda archive lacks, but also the troubling critical legacy it has created?

To address this question, the first section of this essay will trace the development of Josie’s mythology from Neruda’s poetry in 1929 to the current gold standard of Neruda biographical criticism in the 2000s. Critics’ reticence to contradict Neruda’s autobiographical writing, their general unfamiliarity with the Asian context, and their “archive fever,” or the fetishistic faith in the potential of archival material to yield new insights, have combined to perpetuate a transparently Orientalist stereotype in the guise of historical fact. The second section demonstrates how fictional European accounts of South Asia, especially George Orwell’s *Burmese Days*, have been given preference over other sources of information on Burma, such that Neruda’s experience there has been alternately obscured or co-opted into European narratives. The misplaced authority given to those texts by archive fever combines with a prevalent misunderstanding of Orientalism within Latin American Studies to render Neruda’s dark vision of Josie and her Asian milieu “realistic.” The third section explores the links between Orwell’s novel and Josie’s legend. These connections are made especially clear in the fictional account of Neruda’s Burma

¹⁶⁰ Derrida, “Archive Fever,” 17.

¹⁶¹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

sojourn, Cristián Barros's *Tango del viudo*, a novel that nevertheless demonstrates the same feverish archival tendencies as more academic work. Finally, the conclusion suggests how Josie's example illuminates current problems in the way we analyze author archives, and those problems impact larger scholarly claims about the impact of these authors' international journeys.

THE MYTH OF JOSIE

Josie Bliss is initially depicted in the first volume of *Residencia en la tierra*, which Neruda began writing in 1925 and completed during his stint as a consular official in Asia. Comparatively, little is known about that period in Neruda's life, except that it was marked by intense loneliness, especially the first years in Burma and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). There are a few pockets of correspondence – with a lover, a sister, a friend – but there are also vast expanses of silence. His official paper trail was even scantier: Infrequent invoices for shipments of nitrate or tea, announcements of appointments, vacations and transfers.¹⁶² Neruda tantalizes future generations of scholars with one letter about a brownie Kodak camera.¹⁶³ Alas, no photos of his time in Burma survive. The very lack of historical detritus has made it easy for generations of scholars ignore the impact of Neruda's Asian residence on *Residencia I*, a problem that I take up in the second section of this essay. If there is one aspect of that period that has been avidly re-imagined in the critical literature, however, it is Neruda's Burmese love affair.

The progression of poems in *Residencia I* tells the story of a passionate dalliance gone sour: in “La noche del soldado” [The Night of the Soldier], Neruda reflects on his visits to a number of “girls with young eyes and hips, in whose hair shines a flower yellow as the lightning,” each of whom he possesses with a “masculine thirst.”¹⁶⁴ A few pages on, in “El joven monarca” [The Young Monarch] he has singled out one among them – or perhaps merely distilled the best in each – as the “most beautiful woman in Mandalay,” the one who

¹⁶² Vol. 1108, No. 95-99, Archivo Histórico, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Santiago de Chile.

¹⁶³ Pablo Neruda, *Cartas a Laura* (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica del Centro Iberoamericano de Cooperación, 1978), 38.

¹⁶⁴ “Muchachas de ojos y caderas jóvenes, seres en cuyo peinado brilla una flor amarilla como el relámpago” ...“sed masculina.” Pablo Neruda, *Residencia en la tierra/ Residence on Earth*, trans. Donald Walsh (New York: New Directions, 2004), 56.

is destined to be his “wife.”¹⁶⁵ This wife and the girls possess a few physical characteristics that mark her out as specifically Burmese: Long dark hair, coiled high and punctuated with flowers, little feet, big breasts, and an assortment of culturally specific accessories, including bangles, toe rings, and cigars. Still, the poem maintains an ambiguity about whether this beautiful “esposa birmana, hija del rey,” is a real, individual woman, or only the ideal that Neruda hopes to find one day.¹⁶⁶ In either case, by the time Neruda leaves Burma, marked by the poem “Tango del viudo” [The Widower’s Tango] his “marriage” has dissolved, and his relatively interchangeable, idealized “wife” has transformed into a very specific, very troubling “evil one.”

Because the images and the story of “Tango del viudo” are so enduring in Neruda criticism, it is beneficial to review them here. Neruda purportedly wrote “Tango del viudo” on the ship that transferred him from his existing consular appointment in Burma to the new one in Ceylon. Although “El joven monarca” is often read as a description of Josie Bliss in better times, “Tango del viudo” is the first of Neruda’s poems to be explicitly and unequivocally linked to her. Neruda would later write in his posthumously published 1974 memoir *Confieso que he vivido* [I Confess That I Have Lived, hereafter, *Memorias*] that he had kept his new appointment secret, sneaking out with a minimum of luggage so that Josie would not suspect that he was abandoning her for good.¹⁶⁷ The poem acts as the letter of explanation he never sent, expressing his lingering tenderness for Josie at the same time it condemns her. Most famously, Neruda uses “Tango del viudo” to accuse Josie of trying to kill him with a kitchen knife. All throughout the poem, however, even in the passages that are set up to praise Josie, the poet paints an intensely unflattering picture of his mistress that constantly ties her to the natural world. He compares her to a dog and to a bird, to water and wind. He even waxes nostalgic about listening to her “making water in the darkness, at the back of the house/ as if spilling a thin, tremulous, silvery, persistent honey”¹⁶⁸ If this image at first appears tender and loving, albeit idiosyncratic, its dark undertones becomes

¹⁶⁵ “La más bella de Mandalay,” “esposa.” Ibid, 62.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Pablo Neruda. *Confieso Que He Vivido: Memorias* (Buenos Aires: Seix Barral, 2000). 121.

¹⁶⁸ “Orinar, en la oscuridad en el fondo de la casa/ como vertiendo una miel delgada, trémula, argentina, obstinada.” Neruda, *Residencia en la tierra*, 84.

clear in Cristián Barros's novelization of their relationship, *Tango del viudo*, examined in part three.

As we shall see, the content of "Tango del viudo" is the essential nugget of Josie's critical afterlife. What I want to highlight here, however, is their grammar: "you *must have* insulted my mother's memory, calling her rotten bitch and mother of dogs;" "you *will later find*/ the knife that I hid there for fear that you *would kill* me."¹⁶⁹ Neruda's use here of the subjunctive and the future tense give the sense, even amid such overwrought descriptions, of a distance between Neruda's perception and Josie's reality. He can only imagine what she will do without him; perhaps he *did* only imagine what she might have done with him. There is a sort of respect for her separate interiority that makes this poem more artful than its later elaborations.

By the end of his life, Neruda had totally collapsed that distance. Although he seems to have recounted his experience with Josie as early as the 1940s, he did not publicly reveal her identity until 1962.¹⁷⁰ By the time he was writing the *Memorias*, Josie was an exotic adventure and evidence, despite their violent end, of his solidarity with the Burmese people: "I entered so deeply into the soul and the life of those people that I even fell in love with a native."¹⁷¹ He also elaborates significantly on the episodes alluded to in "Tango del viudo:" Sometimes I was awakened by a light, a ghost that moved behind the mosquito net. It was her, dressed in white, brandishing her long and sharpened indigenous knife. It was her circling my bed for hours on end unable to decide whether to kill me. ... the following day she would honor mysterious rites to retain my fidelity."¹⁷²

Before continuing with the critical afterlife of the Josie myth, however, I would like to take a moment to clarify just how much of it might be myth as opposed to fact. Contemporary correspondence corroborates the assertion in Neruda's memoirs that he was

¹⁶⁹ "Habrás insultado el recuerdo de mi madre, llamándola perra podrida y madre de perros;" "hallarás más tarde / el cuchillo que escondi allí por temor que me mataras." Ibid. Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁰ Hernán Loyola, *Neruda: la biografía literaria* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Planeta Chilena, 2006), 342. Adam Feinstein, *Pablo Neruda: A Passion for Life* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), 65.

¹⁷¹ "me adentré tanto en el alma y la vida de esa gente, que me enamoré de una nativa." Neruda, *Memorias*, 121.

¹⁷² "A veces me despertó una luz, una fantasma que se movía detrás del mosquitero. Era ella, vestida de blanco, blandiendo su largo y afilado cuchillo indígena. Era ella paseando horas enteras alrededor de mi cama sin decidirse a matarme. Al día siguiente celebraba misteriosos ritos en resguardo a mi fidelidad." Ibid.

sexually interested in Burmese women, even as his letters clearly show racial animus directed at those same figures.¹⁷³ It seems plausible that Neruda could have formed a relationship with one of them, and that she might have displayed the tendencies he attributes to her in “Tango del viudo.” At this point, however, is important to remember that living in Burma for a year did not make Neruda an expert in Burmese culture. Even if their relationship were one of mutual passion, as he characterizes it, it is plausible that he could have misinterpreted Josie’s performance of normal Burmese interpersonal relations. More likely, still, is the possibility that their relationship was not carried out under the conditions of mutuality that Neruda suggests. Instead, we must consider that, despite his reduced finances, Neruda would have appeared in a position of power to the hypothetical Josie, phenotypically aligned with the white colonial rulers and holding a government job. Her relationship with him, therefore, might have been motivated less by sexual passion than the pursuit of financial security or prestige; her performance of jealousy a calculation, rather than a compulsion. Finally, we must consider the possibility that the Josie myth as it appears in the *Memorias* is an outright fabrication, in whole or in part.¹⁷⁴ The perpetuation of the Josie myth, of a woman beside herself with passion for the poet, is one transparently flattering to the vanity of its creator, even more so in the retrospective gaze of his *Memorias*, where she comes to represent not only his sexual magnetism, but also his ethnographic prowess. Setting aside the obvious Orientalist tropes that infuse Neruda’s depiction of Josie, these simple facts about the conditions of their relationship should pique a healthy skepticism among scholars.

Instead, the majority of biographers have perpetuated the *Memorias* version of the Josie myth as the final authority. Merely repeating its details in the context of scholarly discourse serves to authorize them as the truth in a way Neruda’s writing cannot do alone. It is worth noting that this earlier generation of biography and criticism was written either

¹⁷³ Schidlowsky, *Neruda y su tiempo*, 132.

¹⁷⁴ The admission that Josie Bliss may never have been a real figure opens up many new critical avenues in addition to the one posed by this chapter. One reviewer suggested an intriguing Lacanian analysis in which Neruda employs the name Josie Bliss to signify a type of otherness that cannot be expressed in words, and a type of pleasure outside of the phallic function. Indeed, the suggestive power of the pseudonym “Bliss” is one on which many critics have briefly commented, without developing the idea further. A more in-depth reading along these lines might yield new insight into Neruda’s own poetic process. The focus of the present article, however, remains on Josie’s afterlife in critical texts, rather than on her role in Neruda’s psychological or poetic development.

before Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published, or before that concept had gained the critical currency it enjoys today. I do not wish, therefore, to anachronistically insist that these authors should have recognized the racism inherent in their elaborations of the Josie myth. Their inclusion is necessary, however, because these early texts form the backbone of Neruda's scholarly archive and perpetuate the Orientalism that later critics unquestioningly repeat.

When they do venture beyond Neruda's original myth, moreover, biographers and critics confront the place where the archive "slips away" have tended to fill in the blanks on Josie and her milieu through a very problematic use of their own imaginative powers. This is especially true of biographies of the 1970s and 1980s, many of them written by personal associates of the poet. In her book of interviews, *Neruda en Valparaíso* [Neruda in Valparaíso], for instance, Sara Vial recounts a vision she had of Josie at one of Neruda's dinner parties: "Suddenly, carried in on a hot and distant wind, there was Josie Bliss, sitting at our table, invisible but glowing, with her sarong and her bare feet."¹⁷⁵ Volodia Teitelboim takes this tendency to the extreme in his book *Neruda: una biografía íntima* [Neruda, an intimate biography], combining biography, poetic analysis and Teitelboim's own experiences, often without signaling exactly where one ends and the other begins. He opens a section titled "Soledad en Birmania" [Solitude in Burma] with a vivid imaginative description of Neruda's impressions upon arriving in Rangoon. Without transition, Teitelboim begins speaking about his own tour of Burma: "There I discovered that the Neruda of *Residencia*, what some consider to be obscure poetry, displays an almost painful realism"¹⁷⁶ His reiteration of the Josie myth – at times a word-for-word citation of Neruda's *Memorias* – comes right in the midst of this description of that "realism." It therefore carries the double weight of Neruda's original assertion and the corroboration of Teitelboim's belated visit:

The most radiant and painful page of Burma is Josie Bliss....
More than once I asked Neruda about Josie Bliss, the English

¹⁷⁵ "De pronto, atraída por una ventarrón cálido y remote, estaba Josie Bliss, sentada a nuestra mesa, invisible y ardiente, con su sarong y sus pies desnudos." Sara Vial, *Neruda En Valparaíso* (Valparaíso: Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, 1983), 52.

¹⁷⁶ "Allí descubrí que el Neruda de *Residencia*, que algunos consideran poesía oscura, es de un realism claro hasta dolor." Volodia Teitelboim, *Neruda* (Buenos Aires: Sudamerica, 2004), 137-38.

pseudonym of that native Burmese woman who, in their intimacy abandoned her Western clothing and her Saxon pseudonym to revert to what she really was. The apparition behind the mosquito net, dressed in white, of the furious beauty with a knife in her hands, ready to murder him out of jealousy.”¹⁷⁷

Teitelboim may have gone all the way to Burma, but he continues to understand it as a book – isomorphic with *Residencia I* – in which Josie is merely a shining page: that place and that woman can only exist in so far as they corroborate Neruda’s story. And in Teitelboim’s reading of that story, a thin mask of European civility is all that separates us from what Josie really was: a monstrous, murderous phantom. If there is a consciousness among this generation of critics that Neruda’s story is not the only one that exists, there is still a feeling that it is the only one worth recording. Emir Rodríguez-Monegal essentially admits as much: “What really matters here (what really mattered to the poet) is the Josie of his memories, of his autobiography, that Enemy of his poems, the Hopeless one who kept waiting inside the indelible scar on the poet’s chest.”¹⁷⁸

In the last several years there has been a critical turn in Neruda biographical scholarship that is more concerned with the material circumstances of Neruda’s life, even when they sometimes contradict the poet’s own accounts. Best represented by the monumental and painstaking work of Hernán Loyola and David Schidlowsky, these biographies – sometimes combined with literary analysis – attempt to ground every assertion in archival evidence. For many periods of the author’s life, this evidence lies thick on the ground, such that the work of the scholar is merely to sift through it to create a coherent narrative. For much of the writing of *Residencia I*, however, and for Josie Bliss in particular, the opposite is true. A relative dearth of archival material from that period makes it impossible to corroborate or deepen Neruda’s account in the traditional way.

¹⁷⁷ “Su página más radiante y penoso de Birmania es Josie Bliss...más de alguna vez pregunté a Neruda por Josie Bliss, seudónimo inglés de esa native birmana, que en la intimidad abandonaba las ropas occidentales y su seudónimo sajón para volver a lo que era. La aparición detrás del mosquitero, vestida de blanco, de la belleza enfurecida con un cuchillo en las manos, dispuesta a matarlo de celos.” Ibid, 193.

¹⁷⁸ “La que aquí importa (la que realmente importa al poeta) es la Josie Bliss de sus recuerdos, y de su autobiografía, esa Enemiga de sus poemas, la Desdichada que continua esperando desde la imborrable cicatriz en el pecho del poeta.” Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *Neruda, el viajero inmóvil* (Barcelona: Editorial Laia, 1988), 90.

Schidlowsky is the more conservative of the two in his choice of sources. He renders the *Residencia I* period thinly, in strict adherence to a narrow band of written documentation comprising pockets of personal correspondence and the few, relatively insignificant official logs held in the Archivo histórico of the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores in Santiago de Chile. He limits his discussion of Josie Bliss to those details that Neruda recounts in the *Memorias*, interspersing them among anecdotes from more authoritative sources. On the one hand, Schidlowsky is the only one of these biographers to draw attention the racism Neruda displayed against Burmese women in correspondence from the *Residencia I* period. In an extended footnote, he criticizes Loyola for defending obviously racist language in Neruda's letters to his sister.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, he does not make any such commentary on the Josie stories, nor is there any accounting for the additional authority lent to those stories through their juxtaposition to anecdotes based on more traditional archival sources.

Faced with the same methodological quandary, Loyola expands and deepens his archive by drawing on other written sources about South Asia, its culture and its women. A sampling of Loyola's use of these sources in his analysis of Josie Bliss should serve to demonstrate the ways in which this form of archive fever can yield a warped or incomplete view of its subject: Neruda's traveling companion Álvaro Hinojosa wrote about his experiences with a Burmese girlfriend who was a was "an example of the terrible and domineering temperament of Burmese women," so Josie, too, must have been domineering.¹⁸⁰ Not only that, but Loyola provides us with the prototype of Burmese opposition leader Ang San Suu Kyi, another proof that all Burmese women, including Josie, too, must have been molded "by a tradition of haughtiness and proud affirmation of their rights and requirements."¹⁸¹ George Orwell and Cristián Barros wrote novels about Burmese women with unusual sexual mores, so Josie, too, must have had an unusual sex life.¹⁸² Tomás Lago wrote about Chinese women's eroticism, so Josie too must have had

¹⁷⁹ Schidlowsky, *Neruda y Su Tiempo*, 132.

¹⁸⁰ "Buena muestra del temperamento terrible y dominante de las mujeres birmanas." Loyola, *Neruda*, 341.

¹⁸¹ "Moldeadas por una tradición de altivez y de orgullosa afirmación de sus derechos y exigencias." Ibid, 371.

¹⁸² Ibid, 363-64.

similar opinions because of the “mongoloid ardor of the native Burmese”¹⁸³ Kabir, the fifteenth-century North-Indian Hindu devotional poet, wrote about self-annihilation as a path toward enlightenment; Loyola accessed his poetry as it was then cited in a translation of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, a Sikh religious text completed in the sixteenth century; therefore Josie, a twentieth-century Burmese Buddhist, too must have believed that ritualistically killing Neruda during intercourse would bring about their ascension to nirvana.¹⁸⁴

If the previous examples are delivered slightly tongue-in-cheek, they stand as a particularly blatant and humorous example of a much subtler, more pervasive problem in this style of criticism about the *Residencia I* period. As I will show in the next section, critics not only understand and explain Josie, but the whole of South Asia through the dubious lens of English and French fiction.

BURMA: A RESIDENCE WITHOUT EARTH

Burma and Ceylon, Neruda’s first and most isolating diplomatic postings, have been treated in two contradictory ways by his biographers and literary analysts. In the first, Burma is the state without qualities, a blank canvas of total isolation in which Neruda perfected the “self-absorbed” stance of the early *Residencia* poems. In the second, it is the picturesque Asian landscape of so many French and English Orientalist novels, exactly conforming to existing literary paradigms, such that Neruda never experienced Asia first hand, but only as a reflection of what he or his critics had already read in Rudyard Kipling, Pierre Loti, Arthur Rimbaud, Leonard Woolf, T. S. Eliot and, most importantly, George Orwell. These perspectives, while different on their surface, both manage to project the critic’s ignorance of the Asian context onto Neruda’s attitudes toward and understanding of Burma and Ceylon.

Stylistically and politically, the three volumes of the *Residencia* series seem to stand apart from Neruda’s other work. They also precipitated a shift in the critical reception of Neruda’s writing, in which he became known “not simply as another good poet, but as the major new

¹⁸³ “Ardor mongólico de los nativos birmanos.” Ibid, 363.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 411-12.

poet of the Spanish language” to borrow René de Costa’s tidy summation.¹⁸⁵ This distinctiveness is particularly true of the initial rupture constituted by *Residencia I*. Although the first and second volumes of *Residencia* were originally published together in 1933, the dates of their composition were clearly separated by the author himself and represent significantly different moments in his life. The division between the first two volumes roughly coincides with a shift from remote postings in Burma and Ceylon in the first, to more cosmopolitan postings in parts of Asia (Singapore and Java), and, subsequently, in Europe in the second.¹⁸⁶ It also marks the slow degradation and ultimate abandonment of the symbolic system that Neruda constructed in the beginning of *Residencia I*. By time the series was completed almost twenty years later, there was very little that aesthetically or politically linked all three volumes other than their shared name.¹⁸⁷ Many critics explain the stylistic and ethical fractures of *Residencia I* as a symptom of the physical displacement the author experienced in Asia during the early years of his consular work for the Chilean government. Marjorie Agosín writes, “the solitude projected in his poetry is the product of all his feelings of alienation in a foreign land.”¹⁸⁸ Yurkievich concurs that *Residencia I* “can be considered a gestation provoked by particular personal experiences, by an alienating posting in the Orient”¹⁸⁹ Bluntly put, Neruda’s experience in Burma, whatever it was, powerfully impacted the trajectory of his writing and career.

So what was that experience? “Solitude,” “alienation,” “isolation,” and their aesthetic products, “hermeticism” and “self-absorption,” are omnipresent in critical descriptions of the living conditions that produced *Residencia I*.¹⁹⁰ To be more precise, these descriptors are

¹⁸⁵ René De Costa, *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 58.

¹⁸⁶ Schidlowsky, *Neruda y su tiempo*, 130.

¹⁸⁷ De Costa, *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*, 59-61.

¹⁸⁸ Marjorie Agosín, *Pablo Neruda*, trans. Lorraine Roses (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 39.

¹⁸⁹ “Puede considerarse una gestación provocada por particulares experiencias personales, por la enajenadora estado en Oriente.” Saul Yurkievich, *Fundadores de la nueva poesía latinoamericana*. (Barcelona: Ariel, 1971), 207.

¹⁹⁰ Amado Alonso, the author of the first book-length consideration of Neruda’s poetry, calls the *Residencia* “hermético.” Emir Rodríguez Monegal, a literary biographer, describes it as “una exploración de ser,” [an exploration of being]. Literary critic Enrico Santí calls it “both self-referential and self-destructive.” Edmundo Olivares Briones, a biographer of Neruda’s time as a consular official in Asia, calls his poetry “ensimismado” [self absorbed]. When explaining the importance of *Residencia* to Neruda’s standing as one of the founders of the new Latin American poetry (the title of his book), Saúl Yurkievich describes his attitude as “empampado de sí mismo” [soaked in himself]. De Costa actually goes to the extent of titling his chapter on the *Residencia* series “Hermeticism,” although

the *only* ones many critics use to address the Burmese context, at all. Such is the insistence on Burma's blankness, it is as if Neruda had endured a prison sentence in solitary confinement instead of being sent abroad. There is a pronounced reluctance to explore the influence of Asia, an insistence that it was unimportant as a place unto itself, such that Yurkievich can write without qualification that in Burma "the poet found no foothold, either cultural or social or historic, no positive significance that could cover the void."¹⁹¹ Inés María Cardone is even more blunt: "His poetry in the Orient reflects *nothing more than solitude*."¹⁹² Note the difference from his time in France and Spain, where Neruda's surroundings are understood to affect both his politics and his poetry in direct, substantial ways.

Three methodological issues account for this difference. First, there is a much more complete record of Neruda's time in Europe than in South Asia. Neruda clearly and publicly articulated his political and artistic shift in this period, while only his letters to his Argentinean correspondent, Héctor Eandi, speak to a relationship between his time in Burma and his poetic development. Moreover, good documentation, due in part to an increase in the poet's notoriety, as well as the opportunity in France and Spain to participate in well-established literary circles, has left us with an abundance of archival material recording the relationship between Neruda's location and his poetic production. As we have seen, the newest and most well-regarded biographical criticism of Neruda makes its mark on the field through an unmatched attention to such material. This methodology naturally directs the scholar's gaze to full sections in the archive while encouraging it to unquestioningly fill in archival gaps.

Second, Neruda scholars, hailing from Latin America, the United States, and Europe, are themselves far more familiar with the milieu of Paris in the interwar period and the

within that chapter he cautions that, "Some critics have made far too much of Neruda's isolation" (88). Amado Alonso, *Poesía y Estilo De Pablo Neruda: Interpretación De Una Poesía Hermética* (Madrid: Gredos, 1997); Rodríguez Monegal, *El Boom de la novela Latinoamericana*; Enrico Mario Santí, "Canto General: The Politics of the Book," *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 32, 3 (1978); Edmund Olivares Briones, *Pablo Neruda, los caminos de Oriente* (Santiago de Chile: LOM Ediciones, 2000); Yurkievich, *Fundadores de la nueva poesía latinoamericana*; De Costa, *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*.

¹⁹¹ "El poeta no encuentra asideros, ni culturales ni sociales ni históricos, ninguna significación positivo para cubrir el vacío." Yurkievich, *Fundadores de la nueva poesía latinoamericana*, 207.

¹⁹² "Su poesía en Oriente no refleja otra cosa que la soledad." Inés María Cardone, *Los amores de Neruda* (Santiago de Chile: Plaza & Janés, 2003), 90. Emphasis added.

struggle against fascism in Spain than with Burma or Ceylon of the late 1920s. The former have well-established ties to literary history that have been described in hundreds of books and articles. No comparable literary scene existed for writers of European languages in Burma or Ceylon. Instead, critics seem to have built up their understanding of these areas and Neruda's experience in them with reference to first-hand accounts by British and French writers in novels and (sometimes fictionalized) memoirs.

In certain ways, as we have seen in Loyola's writing and shall return to in the third section, these accounts have been used in place of factual sources to establish the context of Neruda's experience. More often, however, this methodology displays itself in the tendency of Neruda scholars to attribute all concrete references to Asia to literary influence rather than first-hand experience. At the place where the factual archive of written record "slips away," as Derrida puts it, archive fever encourages these critics to reach for works of Orientalist fiction. Since such French and English texts are more likely to be accessible to these critics than other sources of knowledge about Burma, they tend to misrecognize what are arguably personal experiences of the author as references to other texts.

For instance, Loyola, Teitelboim and Feinstein all spend considerable space tracing Neruda's English reading list in the *Residencia I* years. This includes attempts to recreate the contents of the personal library of a well-known Ceylon intellectual of Dutch extraction named Lionel Wendt, from whom Neruda borrowed books. They then attach any specific Asian referent to that list. Thus, in Loyola's reading, the poem "Colección nocturna" [Nocturnal Collection] is a reiteration of famed French exoticist Pierre Loti's novel, *Mon frère Yves*.¹⁹³ Feinstein understands Neruda's flight from Chile and subsequent "hellish" experience in Rangoon in terms of Rimbaud's poetry and subsequent Asian sojourns.¹⁹⁴ In Feinstein's and Loyola's accounts, Neruda's impressions of in Ceylon follow the contours of Lenard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*, a novel written during the latter's time as a colonial administrator for the British government.¹⁹⁵ If the cosmology of *Residencia I* seems to echo Buddhist thought, it is because Neruda was reading Schopenhauer¹⁹⁶ or T.S. Eliot,¹⁹⁷ not the

¹⁹³ Loyola, *Neruda*, 306.

¹⁹⁴ Feinstein, *Pablo Neruda*, 52, 64.

¹⁹⁵ Loyola, *Neruda*, 391-94; Feinstein, *Pablo Neruda*, 68.

¹⁹⁶ Loyola, *Neruda*, 429.

¹⁹⁷ Teitelboim, *Neruda*, 149.

fact that he was living in countries where Buddhism was the religion of the majority. It must be underscored that this line of argument persists in no small part because books are a trace that can be included in an archive, one of very few traces of the *Residencia I* years that can be so recorded. By allowing these texts to have the last word on Neruda's Burmese experience, however, scholars are reauthorizing the Orientalist assumption that Asia can only be experienced through the prism of literature, or that such texts constitute the ultimate authority about how Asia really is.¹⁹⁸

Yet fault for the relative lack of attention to the Asian context does not lie with scholars alone. The third methodological impediment to a fuller account of Asia's influence on *Residencia I* comes from Neruda himself. In his *Memorias*, Neruda seems unequivocal: "I have read some essays about my poetry which suggest that my stay in the Far East has influenced certain aspects of my work, especially *Residence on Earth* ... this claim of influence strikes me as mistaken."¹⁹⁹ Yet it becomes clear as one continues reading that Neruda has not positioned himself against the concept of any Asian influence whatever. Instead he defends himself against a kind of Asian influence particular to the era in which the memoirs (and not the poems themselves) were written. When Neruda inveighs specifically against "Western vagabonds, not to mention residents of both North and South America ... speaking only of Dharma and Yoga,"²⁰⁰ he is writing in an age when interest in South Asia revolved almost exclusively around this kind of spiritual tourism. Such an enchantment with the East, which Neruda reports having abandoned as early as 1927, remained unattractive to him later in life.²⁰¹ Instead, he retroactively defines his own understanding of Asia as "a great, wretched human family, without any space in my mind for its gods or their rites"²⁰² He thus reduces the cultural difference between himself and the Asian population he encountered in the 1920s to a matter of religion—a form of false consciousness that Marxism casts off to reveal an underlying unity. Although such a

¹⁹⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism* 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 156.

¹⁹⁹ "He leído en algunos ensayos sobre mi poesía que mi permanencia en Extremo Oriente influye en determinados aspectos de mi obra, especialmente en *Residencia en la tierra*...digo que me parece equivocado eso de la influencia." Neruda, *Memorias*, 85.

²⁰⁰ "Aventureros occidentals, sin faltar americanos del Norte y del Sur... asa gente se llenaba la boca con el Dharma y el Yoga." Ibid.

²⁰¹ Loyola, *Neruda*, 304, 307.

²⁰² "Una grande y desventurada familia humana, sin destinar sitio en mi conciencia para sus ritos ni para sus dioses." Neruda, *Memorias*, 85.

characterization fits neatly into Neruda's Marxist political leanings at the time of writing the *Memorias*, it is not, in fact, appropriate to his attitude in the 1920s.

Not long after he arrived in Asia, Neruda wrote to a friend about his experience of Burmese women: "The women, that material so indispensable to the organism, are dark skinned, wear their hair in tall styles stiff with lacquer, rings in their noses, and have a particular smell. Everything is charming the first week. But then the weeks pass, time passes."²⁰³ The charm of Asia – literally that which is "encantador" – wears away to leave an increasingly disenchanted picture in its wake. This observation and similar ones in his letters and *Memorias* imply that the process of moving from enchantment to disenchantment involves the peeling back of illusion to reveal the sordid reality beneath. This line of thinking suggests that *Residencia I*, which Neruda would later condemn as "soaked in atrocious pessimism and anguish," was ideally situated to observe the truth about its Asian milieu.²⁰⁴ Certain scholars, like Teitelboim in the passage cited above, have even credited this pessimism as proof of Neruda's clarity of vision and incipient Marxist leanings. Yet by presenting such a bleak picture of what he saw to be the real Asia, as opposed to what he had been led to expect by novels and poetry, Neruda came no closer to an unmediated conception of Asia. He simply fell in line with another common trope of Orientalist thought.

In Said's original definition of literary Orientalism, some writers react to the disjuncture between the written and the experienced by retreating into descriptions of the Orient's glorious past or esoteric religious practices, in short, its charms. This is the type of engagement that Neruda censures in the *Memorias*. A second set of writers, Neruda among them, focus their attention squarely on the most squalid elements of their personal experiences, thereby expressing what Said calls a "quality of disappointment, disenchantment or demystification," and equally typical of Orientalist writing.²⁰⁵ Scholarship in the nascent field of Latin American Orientalism has tended to focus on authors like Octavio Paz, whose engagement with Asia clearly follows the contours of

²⁰³ "Las mujeres, material indispensable al organismo, son de piel oscura, llevan altos peinados tiesos de laca, anillos en la nariz y un olor distinto. Todo esto es encantador la primera semana. Pero las semanas, el tiempo pasa." Quoted in Loyola, *Neruda*, 304.

²⁰⁴ "Empapados de un pesimismo y angustia atroces." Quoted in Rodríguez Monegal, *Neruda*, 13.

²⁰⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 181.

enchantment. Indeed, Feinstein and D. P. Gallagher explicitly make a contrast with Paz in order to prove Neruda's clarity of vision. Even when identifying Neruda's *Residencia I* poetry as potentially Orientalist, attention has overwhelmingly been paid to moments of idealism, enchantment and adventure, elements that, in fact, are relatively scarce in this deeply pessimistic work.

Unsurprisingly, descriptions of women are one of these rare enchanting elements, and one of the few places in which *Residencia I* has been linked to Orientalist thought. Patricia Vilches has laid the groundwork for a critique of Neruda's Orientalism as it pertains to representations of women in her article "La más bella de Mandalay" (a quote from Neruda's "El joven monarca"). Vilches focuses particularly on the portrayal of women in two prose poems, "La noche del soldado" and "El joven monarca," and her analysis of Neruda's descriptions of these women leads her to conclude that Asian women are acting as a foil to Neruda's sense of self in a typically Orientalist manner. Their sexual openness, submissiveness and passivity may be aligned with Orientalist notions of Asian womanly essence. Taken together, these features create an essentialized version of Asian women in *Residencia I* that, for Vilches, can be connected to canonical European literature in general and, in particular, with Said's analysis of Gustave Flaubert and the Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk.²⁰⁶

Curiously, although Vilches makes Said's reading of Kuchuk the prototype from which to base her critique of Neruda's work, she has not actually captured the full scope of Said's argument when invoking her. This causes her to miss the more significant Orientalist discourse operating in Neruda's negative, disenchanted portrayals of female characters. Returning to Said's own work in *Orientalism*, it becomes clear that the Kuchuk stereotype is made up equally of features that are enchanting and disenchanting. Vilches thoroughly describes this woman in her mode as an enchantress: compliant, docile and sexually open in addition to possessing a sexual wisdom inversely proportional to her general naiveté or even stupidity. The same woman, however, has a dark side, animalistic in her hygiene and living arrangements, actually barren despite all the signs of her fertility. For the Kuchuk of

²⁰⁶ Patricia Vilches, "'La Más Bella De Mandalay': Construcciones Orientalistas De La Feminidad En Residencia En La Tierra De Neruda," in *Moros En La Costa: Orientalismo En Latinoamérica* (Madrid: Vervuert, 2008), 208.

Flaubert's report was not only memorable for her "learned sensuality," but also for her "mindless coarseness," and smelled as much of bedbugs as of sandalwood perfume.²⁰⁷ This model also encompasses what Said calls the "Fatal Woman" whose craftiness and emotionally volatility lead to outbursts of suicidal and homicidal violence.²⁰⁸ It is this version of the Oriental woman, moreover, that makes the most lasting impression on Neruda's work and the subsequent scholarship about *Residencia I*. It is hardly necessary to detail the ways that the Josie myth – in which Josie is homicidal, animalistic, pathologically superstitious, and yet perversely attractive to her Western lover – aligns with the Fatal Woman stereotype.

It is also this version of Josie Bliss that is key to unraveling the knotty methodological problem described above. She seems to be the only specifically Burmese experience that Neruda scholars are comfortable talking about. This is true even though her presence in Neruda's life is no easier to archive or materially corroborate than any of the other aspects of his life in Burma, aspects about which scholars are so reluctant to speculate. Instead, it is the legacy of similar female stereotypes in the archive of English and French Orientalist literature that makes Neruda's portrayal immediately plausible to these scholars as fact. The invisibility of pessimism as a form of Orientalism has allowed otherwise conscientious scholars to unquestioningly perpetuate its forms in their own writing.

The following section examines the role of George Orwell's *Burmese Days* as a specific textual model for the Josie myth, focusing particularly on the Burmese prototype of the Fatal Woman provided by the character of Ma Hla Mae. This is most evident in Cristián Barros's creative reimagining of Neruda's Burmese life, *Tango del viudo*, a novel that, despite its overt status as fiction, displays the same kind of "archive fever" as do purportedly non-fictional descriptions of that period.

BURMESE DAZE: ORWELL'S HOLD ON THE CRITICAL IMAGINATION

Early in "Tango del viudo," Neruda makes a list of habitual complaints: "about the tropics, about the *corringhee* coolies/ about the poisonous fevers that did me so much

²⁰⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 180-186.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 180.

harm/ and about the frightful Englishmen that I still hate.”²⁰⁹ These specific maladies will be familiar to any reader of British fiction about colonial India: they are shared in Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster’s accounts of North India, Woolf’s version Ceylon, and Orwell’s recounting of Burma. And though the line about “espantosos ingleses” seems more at home in Loti’s dream of an India “without the English,” alienation from the Anglo-Indian establishment is time-honored trope of British writing about South Asia. Thus, it is just when Neruda poses himself in direct opposition to the Imperial establishment in Burma that he truly inhabits their sensibilities.

If this type of self-reflexive criticism is a hallmark of descriptions of English Imperialism, however, it could hardly be taken further than in Orwell’s debut 1934 novel, *Burmese Days*. Based on Orwell’s time in the Burmese Imperial Police from 1922-1927,²¹⁰ it tells the story of a British timber merchant, Flory, whose sympathy with Burmese natives and ambivalence about the British Imperial project puts him at odds with the small cluster of Anglo-Indians in a remote Burmese town. Intensely lonely, Flory pins his hopes for companionship on the recently arrived Elizabeth Lackersteen, hopes that are eventually dashed after a public humiliation by his Burmese lover Ma Hla Mae. Like Josie, Ma Hla Mae is animalistic, compared in her pleasing moments to a kitten (as Josie is to a tiger or a panther), and in her offending moments to a dog or a worm. Like Josie, she is intensely jealous, and hurtles without warning from calm complacency into suicidal or homicidal fits. As in Teitelboim’s description of Josie, Ma Hla Mae is able to put on a somewhat flimsy performance of Europeanized respectability – represented by white face powder in Orwell and Western clothes in Neruda – but these can only ever partially disguise what they really are. Even so, neither Flory nor Neruda can seem to loosen these women’s hold on their erotic imagination. While the Josie myth is calculated to massage Neruda’s ego, however, the character of Ma Hla Mae is designed to lay Flory’s low. For Orwell, she encapsulates all the weaknesses of character brought on by the European presence in Burma – laziness, self-delusion and cowardice – and her final claim on Flory metonymically attaches these shortcomings to him. Unlike E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, to which it is often compared,

²⁰⁹ “Del tropico, de los coolíes corringhis,/ de las venenosas fiebres que me hicieron tanto daño/ y de los espantosos ingleses que odio todavía.” Neruda, *Memorias*, 85.

²¹⁰ Just as Neruda entered diplomatic service under his given name, Neftalí Reyes, George Orwell still went by Eric Blair during his time as a civil servant in Burma.

Burmese Days does not in the end offer human connection as a path to redemption. Instead, its cynical, knowing tone is evidence of an all-consuming pessimism about the human condition.

Beyond the parallels between Josie Bliss and Ma Hla Mae, it is this pessimism that connects Orwell's project in *Burmese Days* to Neruda's in *Residencia I*. It is the same false association between disenchantment and truth, between cynicism and clarity, which has probably attracted scholars to Orwell's novel as a primary source to establish context for Neruda's Burmese residence. Loyola is particularly guilty of this association. He uses *Burmese Days* as a through line to narrate Neruda's time in Burma, citing the novel at least a dozen times, including extended comparisons that run for three or four pages at a stretch.²¹¹

Critics are likely also attracted by certain similarities in the two writers' biographies in the period. Orwell left Burma just as Neruda was due to arrive in 1927. As in *Residencia I*, inertia and isolation are major themes in *Burmese Days*, but in both cases, their intense, self-absorbed pessimism is tempered by an incipient interest in and concern for others, one that will develop, in later work, into more robust socialist sensibilities. Like Neruda's poetry, Orwell's writing became increasingly political in the 1930s when both men were living in Europe. As with so many writers of their era, both men were drawn into the anti-fascist struggle of the Spanish Civil War, which impacted their writing in intense, though dissimilar ways. On the other hand, Orwell's satirical angle and political interests were always relatively clear and consistent, while *Residencia I* has often been considered apolitical, including by the author himself. In recasting Neruda's journey in Orwell's mold, therefore, scholars may be acting out a sort of wish fulfillment in which the political and aesthetic concerns of *Residencia I* can be harmonized with later work to produce a more coherent narrative about Neruda's poetic development. This is another theme that an examination of Barros's novel allows us to see more clearly than any single scholarly work.

It's worth including an analysis of Barros's 2003 novel *Tango del viudo* in the present work precisely because it so neatly illustrates the shortcomings in many current critical strategies for talking about the *Residencia I* period, and Josie Bliss in particular. Like the earlier Neruda biographers and literary critics, Barros's project is to imaginatively reconstruct this period about which relatively little is concretely known. Other than a few

²¹¹ Loyola, *Neruda*, 329-32, 336-40, 342, 349, 352, 363.

explicit references to English literature, he insists in the author's note, the rest "is utterly false, novelistic."²¹² This final insistence, the last page of the book, belies the degree to which Barros displays an almost academic concern for textual sourcing.

This is most evident, of course, in his framing of the narrative as a more extended version of the internal monologue Neruda presents in "Tango del viudo." No detail from the poem is too small to escape unelaborated in the various episodes of *Tango del viudo*. As a novelist, Barros might have elaborated these episodes in any number of ways, so it is telling that his particular version only serves to reauthorize and even intensify the racist and misogynistic stereotypes that Neruda and his scholars have perpetuated over time. Barros opens with an extended reflection on Neruda's line about Josie urinating the darkness, cited above. This takes the form of an enraged Josie, who, having just discovered that Neruda intends to abandon her for his new posting in Ceylon, spends hours crawling around the house and garden on all fours, urinating on everything she sees.²¹³ Barros is equally assiduous in his elaboration of every Josie-related detail from the *Memorias*. Expanding on Neruda's somewhat vague assertion that Josie "would honor mysterious rites to retain [his] fidelity," Barros imagines not one, but several scenes in which Josie ritualistically bathes her vulva in a dish of milk.²¹⁴ It should be evident that these are, in the generous vagueness of academic terminology, problematic elaborations of Neruda's writing. Yet it is precisely their extreme nature that helps to clarify the epistemological problems lurking in tamer, non-fictional Neruda biographies.

Like Schidlowsky, Barros is eager to pin his imaginary 1920s Burma on concrete details from archival sources, even when those sources are scant or insignificant. This archive fever gives pride of place to elements like pictures and statues of the Buddha, mentioned to Eandi in their correspondence, or tea and nitrate from Neruda's official work at the consulate, recorded in the Archivo histórico. The Colección Neruda at the Universidad de Chile holds a collection of 7,000 shells Neruda collected during his time in Asia, so naturally Barros scatters them throughout the text. He even imagines Neruda having printing a photograph of himself with Josie and then purposely abandoning it on his way to

²¹² "Es puramente falso, novelesco." Cristián Barros, *Tango del viudo* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Planeta Chilena, 2003), 359.

²¹³ Ibid, 11.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 227, 336.

Ceylon, thus fulfilling the archivist's dream of an independently corroborated Josie, while simultaneously acknowledging its impossibility.²¹⁵

Like Loyola, however, Barros is also ready to move beyond those sources when they prove insufficient, and like the official biographer, he finds French and British Orientalist fiction ready to hand as the most plausible textual alternative. Knowing that Neruda admired Rimbaud and studied him in university, Barros, like Feinstein, imagines Neruda reading Rimbaud and speaking about on Burma through the idiom of Rimbaud's poetry. Similarly, Barros has Neruda conceive of his articles about South Asia, written for *La Nación*, as a recapitulation of travel writing by Loti, an assertion later echoed in Loyola's work. Just like the many academic critics who focus on literary influence because they cannot account for the Burmese landscape, Barros has created a purportedly real Burma for Neruda to inhabit, only to fill it up with European books. Appropriately enough, this fictional Neruda periodically refreshes his book collection through the "*book-wallah*," an intertextual visitor from *Burmese Days*. In fact, it is Orwell's novel and Orwell himself that furnish the most references for the Burma that Barros imagines. In his laziness, his drunken self-pity, and most specifically his inability to tear himself away from Josie's charms, Neruda essentially becomes the Chilean Flory to Josie's Ma Hla Mae. In a much more literal sense, Barros's version of Neruda actually inherits Orwell's house and wait staff, and finds himself following the latter's peregrinations through Rangoon. Thus, even when the Neruda of Barros's *Tango del viudo* moves beyond his books and interacts with the world first hand, that world is totally over-determined by the perspective of a British civil servant making his way through the empire.

To Barros's credit, he ultimately acknowledges the Orientalism in Neruda's vision of Josie Bliss, even as his novel revels in its most salacious tropes. In a surprise twist ending, it turns out that Neruda's male servant, in cahoots with Josie Bliss, has been siphoning off highly explosive nitrate from incoming shipments from Chile and sending them to anti-colonial rebels. Josie was a self-conscious agent of these rebels whose sexual antics were a sort of distraction for the hapless rubber-stamper, Neruda. In one blow, then, Barros attempts to heal the racist and misogynistic insult of all those milk baths, while simultaneously making Neruda an accidental communist rebel, thereby retroactively

²¹⁵ Ibid, 201.

harmonizing his late life persona with the man he was in 1928. The final twist may be a clever narrative device, but cannot counter the weight of everything that came before it. Despite the explicit warning that it was all his imagination, and his dexterous disavowal of racism in the novel's surprise ending, Barros's elaborations of the Josie myth have only served to make it stronger and more pernicious. Just three years after the novel's publication, Barros's Josie – the superstitious, sexually voracious savage – had already been reauthorized in the scholarly archive, cited as truth by Loyola in the highly respected *Biografía literaria*.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that generations of Neruda scholars have been writing about Josie Bliss in the wrong way. Not because the “real” Josie was different than how they portray her, but because the “real” Josie, whoever she may be, remains outside of the bounds of what literary and biographical scholarship can reach. Though they have not yet realized it, Josie is not properly a subject for that scholarship; she is an absence, a window that their many layers of paper have covered over, obscuring its view. The object of this chapter has been to peel back those layers, to peer through the gap left by that unrecoverable woman and see what it reveals about the archive in which her papier-mâché form has been so long entombed.

To do so, it has been essential to identify the alignment of certain representations of Josie with tropes typical of Orientalist thought. This work is not unprecedented; as discussed above, Patricia Vilches has already identified many of these tropes in her own scholarship on Neruda. If this essay has merely added more examples – even a whole class of examples, “the disenchanted” – to that work, then it would not fundamentally interrupt our understanding of Latin American Orientalism, or even Neruda's place in that field. Indeed, much fine scholarship has emerged in the last two decades describing Latin American (or sometimes Hispanophone) literature that addresses the East. Some of these analyses also engage in a broader debate about whether Eastward gazes by non-European

authors can properly be considered Orientalism, since they occur at a remove from the systemic violence of imperialism that undergirds Said's original concept.²¹⁶

What is missing from these studies is Said's careful attention to methodology and institutionalization. Speaking very broadly, Said's concept of Orientalism functions at three distinct levels: (I) real political relationships of European domination over its colonies. These yield (II) optics conditioned by those relationships, what I have been calling "methodologies." These methodologies in turn produce (III) stereotypical tropes about colonized peoples and places. Any engagement with Orientalism would do well to respect the primacy that Said gives to this second, methodological level, recalling that the critical term "Orientalism" itself is derived from an academic discipline and its ways of seeing the East. Moreover, it is this attention to methodology that allows us to understand the significance of archive fever for studies of Orientalism. As I have shown, we should consider archive fever to inform the methodology according to which scholars, faced with apparent archival limits, nevertheless feel compelled to draw on ever more tenuous and troubling written sources that reauthorize racist representations of South Asia.

Until now, even when scholars of Latin American Orientalism have engaged in broader philosophical debates about the nature of Orientalism in the global periphery, they still conceive of their critical object as a series of tropes in individual texts. This comes somewhat at the expense of attention to the larger economic, social, and political contexts in which such texts are produced and circulated, and to the absolute exclusion of the context in which they are analyzed and archived. As this paper has shown, methodological assumptions about what Asia is and who has authority to speak about it have perpetuated and intensified the racism inherent in Neruda's original writing. As a result, some of the

²¹⁶ Julia Kushigian and Hernán Taboada argue that the use of Orientalist tropes is strictly an expression of benign curiosity and solidarity, while other critics like Patricia Vilches portray Latin American writing about the East as an uncomplicated reproduction of European-style racism. A third stream of criticism, represented by Ignacio López-Calvo argues that Latin American representations of the East cannot be considered Orientalist by virtue of the fact that they do not emerge from the kind of political relationship that existed between Imperial powers and their colonies. Julia Kushigian, *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition: In Dialogue with Borges, Paz, and Sarduy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 1991; Hernán Taboada, "Latin American Orientalism: From Margin to Margin," in *Paradoxical Citizenship: Edward Said*, ed. Silvia Nagy (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006); Patricia Vilches, "'La Más Bella De Mandalay,'" Ignacio López-Calvo, ed. *One World Periphery Reads the Other: Knowing the "Oriental" in the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010).

most abhorrent elements of the Josie myth were newly minted in books of the last decade, books that were subsequently celebrated specifically for their *methodological* triumphs. The flaws that Josie's case exposes in those methodologies should not only influence future Neruda scholarship, but also compel all future studies in the field of Latin American Orientalism to consider their own critical bibliographies as a potential site of inquiry.

In this light, it suddenly matters that Neruda encountered Josie, his violent and sensual "panther" [pantera] in Rangoon and not Paris, Buenos Aires or Valparaíso. It matters what forces brought him to Burma: his need for a job to support his writing, the political relationship between Chile and the British Imperial government, even the fact that Burma in 1928 was administered as part of India and not yet as a separate province. It matters, as Schidlowsky rightly emphasizes, that Neruda materially benefited from his status as a white man in Burmese society, and that he was able to transfer his existing racial categories of light and dark from Chile to Burma with little revision. It matters that British and French Orientalist literature conditioned his understanding of Burma, but it also matters that his time there may have included experiences that countered those narratives. It matters that there are gaps between his understanding of Burma in 1928 and in the 1970s when he wrote his *Memorias*, and it matters which of those two Nerudas was more accessible – either in person or in archival forms – to the majority of scholars who would one day write his life story. Finally, as I have shown in this article, it matters immensely what those scholars wrote, what their role was in reauthorizing the Josie myth and all that it implies.

If part of this chapter has been to critique a set of Neruda scholars and their methods with reference to Josie, it has certainly not been my intention to cast aspersions on their work in general. My own investigations into Neruda's *Residencia I* period would not be possible without their research. Some of those authors and those strategies that have come in for the harshest critique in this context have, in other areas, yielded the greatest insights. Unlike certain scholars in "archival studies," I am not equally suspicious of all uses of archival material. Likewise, although I inveigh against certain assertions of literary influence, I have no general quarrel with this form of criticism. Instead, it is the Burmese context, so unfamiliar to most Neruda scholars, that reveals pitfalls in these tried and true analytic strategies.

Returning to Stoler, this essay has reinforced the idea that the process of recording and cataloguing itself actively creates categories and authorizes oppressions. Of course, the governmental archives Stoler examines operate in a realm of power that more personal archives cannot hope to replicate. Yet those personal archives still have the ability to shape scholarship according to the logics of their construction, logics that are, in turn, re-formed by the scholarship that becomes a part of them. For the better part of a century, Josie's predicament within the Neruda archive has represented an epistemological limit that no one even recognized was there. The time has come to see her for who she really is, and to let her go.

Sojourners: The Shared Stylistics of Latin Americans Living in India

INTRODUCTION

My experience of India has been ... total unfamiliarity/estrangement. Not hostility (that is Spaniards and Mexicans) nor indifference (in the manner of the English) but rather... I don't know how to put it. Coexistence – promiscuity, the feeling of being surrounded by a human vegetation that does not know you and that you will never know.²¹⁷

This description was written by Octavio Paz to fellow poet Tomás Segovia during his time serving as the Mexican ambassador to India.²¹⁸ It returns us the problematic from chapter one with Faiz Ahmed Faiz's *Safarnāmāh-e Cuba*: How do you represent a cultural encounter based on “total unfamiliarity”? How do you approach an environment that you feel you and your audience do not know and, perhaps “will never know?” Moreover, how do we, as scholars, come to understand this representational approach? Should we read “unknowability” as a recapitulation of the Orientalist category of “inscrutability,” or, more specifically, as the way of seeing India as uniquely challenging to perception, what Sara Suleri has diagnosed as the “Indian Sublime?”²¹⁹ Or, on the other hand, should we understand Paz's claim about what can be known to be an example of humility in the face of cultural difference? The chapter that follows centers on the two possibilities embedded in

²¹⁷ “Mi experiencia de india ha sido... la extrañeza total. No la hostilidad (eso es español y mexicano) ni tampoco la indiferencia (a la sajona) sino... no sé como decirlo. La coexistencia—la promescuidad, el sentirte rodeado de una vegetación humana que no te conoce y a la que no conocerás nunca.” Octavio Paz, “Nueva Delhi noviembre 1965-Nueva Delhi agosto 1968,” in *Cartas a Tomás Segovia (1957-1985)* (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008), 26.

²¹⁸ It's notable that much of Paz's correspondence with Segovia related to finding ‘non-professionalized’ work for the latter as an ambassador or visiting professor (two positions with which Paz had previously experienced success). This speaks the issue of “support” discussed in chapter one, in which the experience of another part of the world was a bi-product of the pursuit of financial security, rather than the purposeful pursuit of cosmopolitan connection.

²¹⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 222. Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, 25-31.

the word “extrañeza,” unfamiliarity and estrangement. It explores the strategies shared by three Latin American sojourners to firstly, represent their own sense of unfamiliarity in confrontation with South Asia, and secondly, produce a sense of that estrangement among their readers.

The previous chapter concluded by noting that scholarship on Latin American texts often invokes Orientalism to diagnose particular stylistic choices, or “tropes,” in individual texts. In certain cases, as with Josie Bliss, unfamiliarity with the South Asian context leads scholars to find certain representations overly plausible because they align with existing Orientalist tropes. However, the inverse is also occasionally true: any obviously Asian referent in Latin American texts may be labeled Orientalist by its mere appearance as other to the cultural milieu of its author. When scholars give a political label to the representational strategies of these sojourner writings – whether the negative appellation of Orientalism or more a positive one like “Signifying” – they often give short shrift to an actual analysis of what is happening in the texts.

Instead, this chapter calls for a suspension of the “diagnosis” of sojourner texts in favor of a version of Eve Sedgwick’s “reparative reading.” As Sedgwick argues, the application of a “strong” (i.e. universalizing) theory – in this case Orientalism – “may have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relationship between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/ epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller.”²²⁰ In the case of sojourner writing, a reparative reading would begin by identifying the particular South Asian referents that are sometimes purposely obscured in these texts, and then suggest commonalities in the representational strategies undertaken by sojourners whose writing has previously been “diagnosed” to opposite ends of the political spectrum, and finally, attempt to understand sojourner texts on their own terms, rather than merely according to our own.

A reparative reading would also enjoin us to confront our own scholarly discomfort with the “unseriousness” of the spiritual dimension that Paz, Sarduy and Báez all bring to their encounter with South Asia. In the introduction, I cited Leela Gandhi’s writing on spiritualism in *Affective Communities*, and her criticism of the assumption that such

²²⁰ Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 124.

engagements by British radicals *cannot* have a progressive political dimension. In the last chapter, we saw how this scholarly habit played out in the critical rejection of Paz's "enchantment" with India in favor of Neruda's "disenchantment." We might say, following Sedgwick, that the emphasis on disenchanted criticism, which frame enchanted readings of India as 'merely' Orientalist is, on the part of the critic, a way of avoiding "bad surprises" that can arise when we address these representations on their own terms. The negative effect of such criticism is that it valorizes the scholar's unwillingness for textual analysis to produce surprises of *any kind*. As Kristina Straub writes about her own engagement with "surface reading" practices:

Three decades of reading and writing criticism and history that speak to ... that collection of agendas that get labeled cultural studies, have worn away the sharpness of my pain in those "gotcha" moments when the text is caught out as conducing to somebody's oppression, as well as eroding my pleasure in those moments when the text subverts that oppression. I feel a desire to learn something new, to be surprised by what I see in a text, to feel the shock of cultural and political unfamiliarity. Theoretically speaking, while I still want to know where I am starting from when I create an interpretation, I would rather not know where I am going.²²¹

Yet, as we have seen in chapter three, the critical embrace of disenchantment as a protection against surprises does not protect against Orientalism – it has actually furthered racism within the critical archive itself. Nor are Asian representational objects like Josie the only ones to suffer the violence of such interpretive models. Sojourning authors do as well. In casting sojourners in a role made to the measure of British and French servants of empire, contemporary scholars of Latin American Orientalism repeat Cristián Barros' mistake in *Tango del Viudo*, in which the Latin American sojourner can never emerge from the shadow of a British colonial official.

²²¹ Kristina Straub, "The Suspicious Reader Surprised, Or, What I Learned from 'Surface Reading,'" *The Eighteenth Century* 54, 1 (2013): 140.

INDIAN PASSAGES

Octavio Paz characterizes his writings about India – *Ladera este* (1962), *El mono gramático* (1972), and the much later *Vislumbres de la India* (1995) – as “Three routes to India” [tres vías hacia la India]. He clarifies that the word “via” has two interrelated meanings: a literal route through territory, and a spiritual route outlining a journey of the soul. “In the case of my three books the two meanings are mixed: they were written along the routes of India, its geographic routes, its historical routes, those of its art and thought.”²²²

This idea of routes and the particular tactics of journeying, especially as they are outlined in *El mono gramático*, are essential the idea of cartographies of engagement. As I describe in the introduction, let us think of a cartography of engagement as one in which an individual author tactically interrupts the pre-established flow through a territory in order to make a route that better suits his or her own needs. In the case of *El mono gramático*, Paz begins moving through the prescribed route for pilgrims at the monkey temple of Galta-ji on the outskirts of Jaipur. Although Paz enters the temple complex in the standard way on the Galta side and seems to progress, albeit slowly, toward the Surya temple on the crest of the ridge on the Jaipur city side, at some point the narrative wanders off. Having entered the temple complex, the Paz of *El mono gramático* in fact never manages to leave. At the same time, many parts of the narrative take place in other locations: at a writing desk in Cambridge, England where Paz took a brief visiting professorship in the midst of his diplomatic assignment in India; in citations of art and texts from India; and in other tourist sites in Jaipur that are rarely formally distinguished within the text from the relatively small temple complex at Galta.

In the introduction, I posed Paz’s idiosyncratic path through Galta as a model for the “engaged” cartographies of the other authors studied here. Drawing on de Certeau’s idea of strategic versus tactical visions of space, I validated Paz’s style of movement and space claiming as a model that could resist more hegemonic visions of cultural circulation offered by “cartographies of domination” and “cartographies of contiguity.” De Certeau’s model emphasizes the binary opposition between mass culture and its “strategies” and individual

²²² “En el caso de mis tres libros los dos significados se mezclan: fueron escritos en los caminos de la India, los de la geografía y los de la historia, los del arte y los del pensamiento.” Octavio Paz, *Ladera este: seguido de Hacia el comienzo y Blanco, 1962 – 1968* (Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, 1996), 5.

actors with their “tactics.” This model works well to describe the conflict between individual authors and circulatory systems that claim to contain them. But what de Certeau’s model does not account for is the conflicts over space and its interpretation that may break out between the *various* tactical actors in the same territory. While other Galta pilgrims also move through the temple complex “tactically” – at their own pace, on their own routes, and for their own reasons – their “tactics” are quite different from Paz’s. The interpretation of Galta, Hanuman, and Indian culture that animates Paz’s journey in *El mono gramático* may not merely be different than those of the Indians walking beside him — it may be quite opposed. Latin American authors may not have come to India as servants of Western imperialism, but that does not mean that *all* of the routes they take are equally innocent of the representational strategies that shore up Western hegemony. The question emerges: How far off the beaten path do sojourning authors have the right (or the capacity) to go?

My use of the term “sojourner” to describe the Latin American authors in this study echoes the writing of Shumei Shih in *Minor Transnationalism*. Describing the mentality and material conditions of ethnically Chinese women moving back and forth between the United States and China, Shih argues that Euro-American criticism insists upon a binary between travel and immigration based on a somewhat arbitrary view of the duration of a stay abroad. Looking back to the example of Chinese bonded laborers, who lived for many years in the Americas while maintaining an affective attachment to Chinese national identity, Shih argues that our conception of transnational movement requires a third, intermediate position, what she calls sojourning.²²³ Although traveling under very different conditions, Paz and other early Latin American sojourners who came to South Asia as diplomats likewise fell somewhere in between the position of tourist and that of a permanent immigrant, both in terms of the purpose of their journeys and the length of their stays.

²²³ Shih writes that “In the messiness of categorizing these two women vis-a-vis the artificial distinctions of disciplinary and methodological boundaries, we are coming closer to identifying the fluidity and complexity of our transnational moment, where migration, travel, and diaspora can no longer be clearly distinguished by intention and duration, nor by national citizenship and belonging.” I would only add that in light of evidence from this chapter, as well as Shih’s own invocation of the nineteenth-century Chinese diaspora, “our transnational moment” is quite a long one. Shumei Shih, “Toward an ethics of transnational encounters,” in *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 74.

While later Latin American visitors would more easily fit the touristic mold, the two other authors I have chosen for the present chapter evince a degree of commitment to South Asia that distinguishes them from more casual tourists.

This chapter will focus on strategies for representing South Asia in the writing of three Latin American sojourners: Octavio Paz, Severo Sarduy, and Josefina Báez, although many of the observations about their texts also hold true for Augusto d'Halmar in chapter two and Pablo Neruda in chapter three. I will be drawing my observations from five books: Paz's previously mentioned essay *El mono gramático* (1972) and the book of poetry *Ladera este* (1962); the final "Diario Indio" section from Sarduy's novel *Cobra* (1972) and his subsequent project *Maitreya* (1978); Báez's first major performance piece *Dominicanish* (2000) and a later book of poetry *Cardamom and Other Spices* (2005). These projects that span genres as distinct as the essay and the performance piece are nevertheless united by certain strategies of representation that will be explored below.

This particular grouping allows us to trace continuities across two radically different reasons for engaging with South Asia. On the one hand, Delhi would be the last diplomatic assignment for Octavio Paz in his role as an official representative of the Mexican government. After serving first as a diplomatic official there in 1951 and then returning as the Mexican ambassador in 1962, Paz would resign in protest after the student massacre of Tlateloco in 1968. His strategies of support after 1968 would increasingly come to resemble the standard methods of a "professionalized" author, meaning that all of his paid work was, in some way, related to his artistic output.²²⁴ Sarduy and Báez, on the other hand, came to India for reasons that are characteristic of Latin American sojourners after 1970. Rather than coming to India accidentally, as an unintended detour on the path toward practical support, they came as tourists and as *chelas*, intentionally seeking new modes of self-cultivation. These took the form of Sarduy's growing engagement with Buddhism, and Báez's career-long commitment to South Indian dance. As tourism to South Asia has become more universally accessible, and as South-Asian identified cultural products have become increasingly available on the transnational mass market, many more Latin American authors and artists have added an Indian veneer to their projects or jotted off a quick

²²⁴ For more on "professionalization," see chapters one and five.

travelogue about the subcontinent.²²⁵ Despite the significant differences in the circumstances by which they arrived there, I have chosen to focus on Sarduy and Báez as a complement to Paz precisely because all three authors evince a deeper and more prolonged engagement with the subcontinent and its cultures.

Like Faiz Ahmed Faiz with Cuba in chapter One, Paz, Sarduy and Báez were faced with the task of representing a place about which their audience has absolutely no preexisting knowledge. Well, to be precise, by the middle sixties when the first of these pieces was written, Latin Americans could be reasonably expected to know *something* about India. Yet there remains a significant distance between what they know from the Beatles or colonial-era English literature and the immediate experience of our sojourners, a knowledge gap that, as we saw, created interpretive problems for Neruda scholars in the previous chapter. The stylistic commonalities between the South Asian writing of all three sojourners can be explained to a significant extent by their strategies for addressing the partial knowledge of their audiences with an equally partial form of citation.

All three sojourners are interested in representing “the routes of India, its geographic routes, its historical routes, those of its art and thought,” but they often do so in a way that intentionally obscures exactly which route they’ve taken. I use the term “incomplete citation,” to refer to a strategy of referencing Indian places and cultural products without their context. This goes so far as to muddle the distinction between the *kinds* of thing being referenced, wither “historical,” “geographic,” or “artistic.” In the previous chapter I emphasized that generations of Neruda scholars read *Residencia en la tierra I* as esoteric and deterritorialized because they did not have the cultural resources to recognize the Asian territory it describes. What I want to claim here is that the shared sojourner practice of incomplete citation actually *encourages* this mis-reading of concrete, literal descriptions as fantastic, imaginative, or abstract.

PAZ

Throughout *El mono gramático*, Paz oscillates almost invisibly between metaphorical language aimed at esoteric themes like the limits of human expression, and absolutely literal descriptions of cultural objects, almost all of them of Indian origin. He

²²⁵ See, for example, Cazu Zegers’ *Bitácora* (1990).

gives the reader almost no tools for discerning which portions actually occur on the journey through Galta, which are flights of imagination and which come from other, partially cited cultural products. Taking *El mono gramático* as emblematic of sojourner literature, I am compelled to ask: what if we seriously entertained Paz's own contention that the scenes he presents in the text should be understood as "a tapestry of presences that hide no secrets. Exteriority and nothing more"?²²⁶ This question is twofold: Why have sojourner authors so often chosen to present a literal, though incomplete, citation of South Asia as metaphorical, and what would we see differently if we developed a practice of "surface reading" – rather than the symptomatic reading offered by Orientalism – to understand those strategies of citation and representation?

The major theme of *El mono gramático* is the inability of human language to adequately capture human experience. In contrast, Hanuman, in his role as grammarian and poet (rather than his more familiar role in Hindu belief as a god of loyalty and physical prowess), represents the potential for a type of "divine writing" that overcomes this limitation.²²⁷ Along with shadows, stains, and branches of trees (discussed below), Paz uses the image of mirrors as a metaphor for the confusion and inadequacy of human language. "I would also point out that the repetitions are metaphors and the reiterations are analogies: a system of mirrors that have, bit by bit, revealed another text"²²⁸ Jaime Alazraki associates this use of mirrors with the philosophy of Wittgenstein.²²⁹ At the same time, however, the hall of mirrors is also a literal reference to India. In section 17, Paz gives an extended architectural description that is never formally distinguished from the Galta complex. It is, however, another place: Ambar Fort, which sits on the opposite side of Jaipur from the Galta temple. Within Ambar, famously, is a hall of mirrors which Paz describes "alcoves decorated with thousands of little mirrors that divide and multiply the bodies into infinity."²³⁰ These

²²⁶ "Un tejido de presencias que no esconden ningún secreto. Exterioridad sin más." Octavio Paz, *El mono gramático* (Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, 1996), 112.

²²⁷ Ibid, 45.

²²⁸ "Advierto también que las repeticiones son metáforas y que las reiteraciones son analogías: un sistema de espejos que poco a poco han ido revelando otro texto." Cited in Jaime Alazraki, "The Monkey Grammarian or Poetry as Reconciliation." *World Literature Today* 56, 4 (1982).

²²⁹ Ibid, 611.

²³⁰ "Alcobas decoradas por millares de espejitos que dividen y multiplican los cuerpos hasta volverlos infinitos." Paz, *El mono gramático*, 90.

mirrors capture an aesthetic of “proliferation, repetition, and annulation” ²³¹ that Paz credits to Rajasthani architecture, but might equally describe the poetics of *El mono gramático*, as Paz himself alludes to in the “system of mirrors” he describes above.

Paz employs similarly veiled literalism in section 8. While he begins by returning to his recurring metaphors of “manchas, malezas” [stains, weeds] to describe the imprecision of language as a reflection of reality, those shadows and weeds quickly transform into a material landscape, taken in by an unnamed third-person observer who catalogues them by proper name. Indeed, proper names for trees constitute almost the whole of the chapter. Everything in this deterritorialized garden has a proper name except the observer, but as he catalogues the world around him, Paz drops hints about who this observer might be: “the *arucaria Bunyabunya* (better known, he thought with a smile, as the Monkey Puzzle)... the Indian Magnolia, the Champak cited by Valmiki when he describe Hanuman’s visit to the garden of Ashoka, in Ravana’s palace in Lanka...” At last, the name of the cataloguer of this (apparently) imaginary garden is revealed: “Hanuman smiles with pleasure before the analogy that has just occurred to him: calligraphy and vegetation, arbors and writing, reading and walking.”²³²

Subsequently in part 10, Paz produces another decontextualized Indian scene again observed, we quickly learn, by Hanuman in the third person. Again, branches and weeds are invoked metaphorically: “Those women were so tangled and linked together by their arms and legs as to form an intricate and wild bower.”²³³ Yet a brief parenthetical citation “(Sundara Kund IX)” at the end of the section is all that indicates that, unlike Paz’s stylistically similar flight of fancy in section 8, this entire section is excerpted from the Valmiki *Ramayana*, the same scene referenced with regard to the “Champak” in section 8.

Here we see Paz setting up the terms of his mirror game. In particular, we notice a form of citation which is not only incomplete, but also reversed, as an image reflected in a mirror. That is, section 8, which includes Paz’s flight of fancy imagining Hanuman in his

²³¹ “Proliferación, repetición, anulación.” Ibid.

²³² “La *arucaria Bunyabunya* (más conocida, pensó sonriendo, como Rompecabezas del Mono) ... la magnolia indostana, el Champak citado por Valmiki al describir la visita de Hanuman al bosque de Ashoka, en el palacio de Ravana, en Lanka...” “Hanuman sonríe con placer ante la analogía que se le acaba de ocurrir: caligrafía y vegetación, arboleada y escritura, lectura y camino.” Ibid, 43.

²³³ “Aquellas mujeres se entretejían y encadenaban con sus brazos y piernas hasta formar una enramada intrincada y selvática.” Ibid.

garden, and Hanuman's own recollection of his journey to the Ashoka gardens, temporally precedes the citation from the Ramayana when that scene first occurs (section 10). We will return to the significance of the temporal dimension of incomplete citation in the next section.

Paz's collection of poetry about India, *Ladera este*, seem, at first, to perform incomplete citation of the Indian landscape in the same way as *El mono gramático*. Take, for instance, the opening poem "Balcones," a reverie inspired by the balcony in his Delhi home. Like many poems in the first two books of the collection, it consists mostly of fairly concrete descriptions of the landscape, in this case what the poet sees around him at night in the city. Yet this specificity is contrasted to the speaker's attitude at the end of the poem "I am here/ *I don't know* is where / not the earth/ time / holds me in its empty hands [...] Distances/ *a pilgrim's steps are vagabond music*."²³⁴ This juxtaposition gives the sense that no amount of literal description will be sufficient to anchor the speaker (or his audience) in his new surroundings, these "far off lands." In particular, the invocation of the line "*pasos de un peregrino son errante*," associates this poem, at the beginning of Paz's own collection, to the sense of disorientation and "peregrination" that inaugurate Luis de Góngoras *Soledades*, in which a nameless wanderer is shipwrecked in an unknown land.

Yet, *Ladera este* is bounded on the other end by footnotes that seem to give exactly the opposite indication. As opposed to the quite literal but decontextualized descriptions that make up many of the poems, the notes give detailed, historically and culturally situated descriptions of the same places or practices that read like any standard travelers' guide. In several cases, the description given in the notes is significantly *longer* than the poem it clarifies. For instance, the poem "El Mausoleo de Humayún" is a scant eight lines, 35 words:

To the debate of the wasps
the dialectic of monkeys
twittering of statistics
it opposed
 (high flame of rose
formed out of stone and air and birds

²³⁴ "Estoy aquí/ no sé es dónde/ No la tierra/ el tiempo/ en sus manos vacías me sostiene... Lejanías / pasos de un peregrino son errante." Paz, *Ladera este*, 21. Translation from Octavio Paz, *The Collected poems of Octavio Paz, 1957-1987*, trans. Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 1987), 171.

time in repose above the water)

silence's architecture.²³⁵

Again, there is a striking recourse to almost literal description. Someone familiar with this popular tourist site in Delhi could easily measure this poem against their own experience there: the "tall pink flame made of stone," clearly refers to the color of the sandstone edifice, while wasps, monkeys and birds are common sights in the gardens surrounding the tomb. The note for this poem, on the other hand, is twice as long as the poem itself.

Son of Babur, conqueror of India, the emperor Humayun was the father of the great Akbar. The family descended from Timur or Tamerlan, Marlowe's Tamburlain, Clavijo's Tamburbeque. Around Humayun's tomb there is, or used to be, one of those centers for the study of what economists and sociologists call "underdevelopment," bustling with Indian functionaries and foreign "experts."²³⁶

If the disorientation of the *Soledades* is a guiding principle for Paz at the beginning of the collection (as it arguably is in *El mono gramático*, as well), then how do we read this belated effort at clarity and contextualization?

Paz himself offers two conflicting explanations. In the 1995 *Círculo de Lectores* edition of *Ladera este* – part of a three part special edition of Paz's writings about India – Paz introduces the notes by saying "Since, in some passages there appear words and allusions to persons, ideas, and things that might estrange/ be unfamiliar [extrañar] to the reader who is not familiar with this region of the world, several friends have suggested that I include some notes that would clear up these obscurities."²³⁷ Paz makes it clear that

²³⁵ "Al debate de las avispa/s/la dialéctica de los monos/gorjeos de las estadísticas opone/ (alta llama rosa /hecha de piedra y aire y pájaros/ tiempo en reposo sobre el agua)/ la arquitectura del silencio." Paz, *Ladera este*, 25. Translation from Paz, *The Collected Poems*, 177. Formatting original.

²³⁶ "Hijo de Babur, el conquistador de la India, el emperador Humayún fue el padre del gran Akbar. La familia descendía de Timur o Tamerlán, el Tamburlaine de Marlowe, el Tamurbeque de Clavijo. En las cercanías del masuleo de Humayún se encuentra, o se encontraba, uno de esos centros de estudio de lo que llaman los economistas y los sociólogos el 'desarrollo,' muy concurrido por funcionarios indios y 'expertos' extranjeros." Paz, *Ladera este*, 169. Translation from Paz, *The Collected Poems*, 641.

²³⁷ "Como en algunos pasajes aparecen palabras y alusiones a personas, ideas y cosas que podrían extrañar al lector no familiarizado con esa región del mundo, varios amigos me aconsejaron incluir

editorial encouragement explains the guidebook-like style of the poetic footnotes. It seems manifestly obvious from the examples above that both *El mono gramático* and *Ladera este* intentionally court the reader's unfamiliarity with the region they represent. Indeed, the potential for ambiguous, multivalent readings of the texts depends upon the way that oblique allusions to "persons, ideas and things" will, minimally "be unfamiliar to," and, more likely, intentionally "estrangle" his imagined audience. We know from his correspondence with Segovia, cited above, that Paz was deeply committed to the idea of India as a privileged location of "extrañeza."

Instead, by looking back at earlier editions of the same collection, we can get different sense of Paz's intention in providing the notes. Thirty years before, in manuscript copies of *Ladera este*, as well as earlier printings, the introduction to the notes contained a final sentence that has apparently been stricken from the *Círculo de Lectores* collection: "I am afraid (I hope?) that these notes, far from dispelling the enigmas, will only increase them."²³⁸ That is, Paz feels that there is something inherently enigmatic in the South Asian landscape. His intentional withholding of context through incomplete citation is meant to reproduce that disconcerted feeling. Yet, he seems to suggest, the attempt at a more complete citation offered in the notes will not, fundamentally, reduce the feeling of foreignness cultivated by his description style.

SARDUY

"I owe to Octavio Paz the most extraordinary gift that anyone can give: India. Without his words and his texts perhaps I would have never gone... India is not simply a continent, it is also an enigma, occasionally a riddle, a constant challenge to perception."²³⁹ So wrote Severo Sarduy in 1990. For Sarduy then, as for Paz in his notes for *Ladera este*,

unas cuantas notas que aclarasen esas obscuridades." Paz, *Ladera este*, 167. This explanatory note is missing from Weinberger's translation.

²³⁸ "[Tengo] el temor (¿la esperanza?) de que estas notas, lejos de disiparlos, aumenten los enigmas." Correspondence between Octavio Paz and Lysander Kemp. Lysander Kemp, 1965-1978, Container 1.5. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin TX. Paz, *Ladera este*, 173.

²³⁹ "Debo a Octavio Paz el regalo más extraordinario que alguien puede hacer: la India. Sin sus palabras y sus textos quizás nunca hubiera ido... Ya que la India no es sólo un continente, es también un enigma, a veces un acertijo, un constante desafío a la percepción." Severo Sarduy, "Paz en Oriente," *Obras III: Ensayos*, 480.

India is an “enigma” whose representation, accordingly, should reproduce the “constant challenge” presented by its initial perception.

In chapter two, we briefly explored Sarduy’s interpretation of India through his 1981 essay *La simulación*. This essay brings together two branches of philosophy that make for uneasy bedfellows: on the one hand, Sarduy’s longstanding relationship to Lacanian psychoanalysis, and on the other, his growing interest in Buddhism. What unite these two areas in *La simulación*, as we have discussed, is the idea that a surface, whether a butterfly’s wing or a drag queen’s makeup, does not protect a presence underneath, but rather becomes the simulation of a generative vacuum. What I will argue here is that Sarduy’s writing about India, especially *Cobra* and *Maitreya*, present a challenge to standard interpretive frameworks in no small part because they embrace this idea of India as a surface without symbolic depth, even as Sarduy struggles to define exactly what kind of surface that might be.

Even within his short essay on Paz, Sarduy offers two ideas of the surface seemingly in conflict. Without Paz’s writing, he states, “I never would have gone [to India]. Or I would have gone in the same way as anyone else: attentive only to that which was most exterior.”²⁴⁰ In this passage, then, he contrasts Paz’s perspective as a sojourner to the perspective of the ever-more-common tourist to India. On the other hand, he argues, Paz’s writing brings us into the “full thickness of the glass” and from that point to the realization that “everything can be read without exceptions, interpreted in its literality: naked appearance.”²⁴¹ What precisely, is the difference between the apprehension only of the “most exterior” nature of India and the “full thickness” of the glass – itself a surface – and the “naked appearance” it reveals? By exploring the final “Diario Indio” section of Sarduy’s 1972 novel *Cobra*, we will attempt to arrive at an answer.

Cobra is the story of a drag queen named Cobra, her fellow performers, and their movements through various spaces – Paris, the Maghreb, India – and incarnations – a collection of drag queens, a biker gang, and group of exiled Tibetan monks. Guided by Sarduy’s interest in Lacanian psychoanalysis and his status as a Cuban exile, Vilashini

²⁴⁰ “Nunca hubiera ido [a la India]. O hubiera ido como va todo el mundo: atento a lo más exterior.” Ibid.

²⁴¹ “Pleno espesor del Vidrio,” and “todo puede ser leído sin residuos, interpretado en su literalidad: apariencia desnuda.” Ibid, 478.

Cooppan has studied *Cobra* as a novel of displaced desire for Cuba and melancholia over its unrecoverable loss. The *absence* of Cuba is, in this symptomatic reading, a displaced (anamorphic) longing for its presence.²⁴² The following reading of Sarduy is indebted to Cooppan's fine analysis of *Cobra* and other pieces in his *oeuvre* as they play within the nexus of national identity and Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts. Yet my analysis will differ from Cooppan at two levels. First, I push back against the symptomatic application of a psychoanalytic framework to *Cobra*, a novel that scholars agree is innovative precisely because of its blunt refusal of psychological interiority. Second, I demonstrate the way that Cooppan's misrecognition of literalism as fantasy within the "Diario Indio" section leads her to a limited reading of that portion of the text. In both cases, a surface reading of that section can help unite two aspects of Cooppan's own reading that are artificially separated in her analysis.

As with Neruda scholars discussed in chapter 3, Cooppan excels at identifying (primarily European) intertextual citations within *Cobra*, but utterly misses the same citational style as Sarduy uses it to mark out the Indian landscape in "Diario Indio." She recognizes "imitations or actual fragments from astronomical textbooks, Buddhist texts, the Book of Ecclesiastes, Miguel Cervantes, Don Luis de Góngora, Jean-Phillipe Rameau's 1735 opera-ballet 'Les Indes galantes,' the journal of Christopher Columbus, and, of course, Lacanian theory."²⁴³ Characterizing the text as "rejoicing in unauthorized borrowings and textual and visual interpretations" with regard to these texts, citations of the Indian landscape are not equivalently recognized or equivalently celebrated.

Let us begin, then, by reading the final section of *Cobra*, the "Diario Indio" according to its surface. Let us take seriously the genre it purports to be in its title, a diary or daily log of impressions, and read the references it makes India according to that logic. Sarduy opens the "Diario Indio" with another textual citation, but one that points not toward other books, but toward the style of incomplete citation of physical space that will characterize the rest of the section. This citation is, in fact, another long, literalist description of an Indian site by

²⁴² Judith Weiss similarly understands the absence of the word "taboo" in *Cobra* to be a symptom of the importance of that concept in a text full of intentionally provocative, Tantra-inspired taboo breaking. Judith Weiss, "On the Trail of the (Un)holy Serpent: *Cobra* by Severo Sarduy," *Society of Spanish & Spanish American Studies* 5, 1 (1977): 57–69.

²⁴³ Vilashini Cooppan, *Worlds Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 228.

Octavio Paz, this one from *Teatro de signos/transperencias*. The passage describes a view of Lodi Gardens – a collection of Mughal tombs in what is now a diplomatic enclave in central Delhi – at night. Characteristically of Paz’s sojourner writing, this scene is offered as a metaphor about nature of time, space, and human perception that is, at the same time, nothing more than a literal description of a view of the tombs at night “There is not above or below: the world has concentrated itself in this serene rectangle. A space in which everything fits and that contains anything but a few images that dissipate.”²⁴⁴ This scene serves as an epigraph because, I suggest, it proposes a way of seeing that suggests metaphorical depth in what is actually a decontextualized but very literal description. The connection between these two levels, moreover, is only readily available to another sojourner like Sarduy, rather than to the Latin American reading public at large. The way of seeing, itself is what Sarduy points us toward in the “Diario Indio.”

When Cooppan characterizes the scenes of India the “Diario Indio” she writes: “The India described and practically hallucinated in the last section of the novel is a rigid national gallery of elephant gods, garlanded bulls, beggars, mystics, celluloid deities, ritual ceremonies, monkeys rioting in temples, bazaars, and orgies... Replete with the exotic-fantastic and rich with cultural fetishism.”²⁴⁵ She goes on to reject any organizing principle other than a shared “Indian-ness” to understand why one image follows the other in this text that, she claims is, “pointedly devoid of interpretive commentary.”²⁴⁶ If we take seriously the diary format proposed by the section’s title, however, then it becomes evident that its descriptions are neither “hallucinatory” nor “fantastic,” although they are arranged so as to seem so. Instead, almost all of the scenes in the “Indian Diary” are incredibly concrete renderings of identifiable places and practices. It is the sojourner practice of incomplete citation that makes them difficult to identify, although, of course, no more difficult than equally partial citations of the texts that Cooppan lists above.

Stripped of their dates of composition, these scenes are nevertheless organized by the location in which they happen. The scene of people sleeping on the streets and “whores

²⁴⁴ “No hay abajo ni arriba: el mundo se ha concentrado en este rectángulo sereno. Un espacio en el que cabe todo y que no contiene sino aire y unas cuantas imágenes que se disipan.” Severo Sarduy, *Cobra* (New York: Dutton, 1975), 229.

²⁴⁵ Cooppan, *Worlds Within*, 247.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 251.

in cages” which Cooppan cites at length seem to be part of the Mumbai scene that also includes a Parsi burial rite and a trip to the Elephanta caves. From there, Sarduy’s roving gaze stops very at the Mughal city of Fatehpur Sikri, “the abandoned capital”,²⁴⁷ the Parshwanath Jain temple in Calcutta “peacocks made of glass, prophets with luminous, little blue eyes and waxed mustaches... columns decorated with tiny mirrors...,”²⁴⁸ rites performed at a Kali temple near by in the same city “your face is black, your fangs bloody, your necklace made of skewered skulls,”²⁴⁹ and the shores of the Ganges at Varanasi “On the stairs, as the fog dispersed, the devotees descend with copper vessels... they have hung up loudspeakers on the poles so that it can be heard on the other shore.”²⁵⁰ Even the ordering of these scenes generally follows a diary logic, in which tourist attractions of the same city are grouped together, often followed by scenes from another city nearby.

Yet it is certainly true that the “Diario Indio” is “*pointedly* devoid” of interpretive cues. With the same style of narration that characterizes a tourist gaze toward architecture, the roving eye also observes defamiliarized scenes of action, blurring the distinction between those that are happening in real time and those that are merely represented in art. Indeed, transitions between different types of narration, especially between the third person and the first, further obscure these differences. As an illustration of what I mean by this, let us look at the following series of passages from the middle of the “Diario Indio,” a section which informs Cooppan’s addition of “orgies” to the stereotypical images this section offers of India.

Me, with a woman’s hair, you, in front, bent over, the palms of your hands against the ground. My fingers mark depressions on your waist, where rows of pearls are knotted, your buttocks and breasts bound. ²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ “La capital abandonada.” Sarduy, *Cobra*, 235.

²⁴⁸ “Pavos reales de vidrio, profetas de ojillos azules, luminosos, y bigoticos engominados...Las columnas decoradas con minúsculos espejos...” Ibid, 243.

²⁴⁹ “Tu rostro es negro, sangrantes los colmillos, tu collar es de cráneos ensartados.” Ibid, 244.

²⁵⁰ “Por las escalinatas, a medida que la bruma se dispersa, con bocales de cobre descienden los orantes... han colgado altoparlantes en los postes para que la escuchen hasta en la otra ribera.” Ibid, 248.

²⁵¹ “Yo, con pelo de mujer, tú, delante, doblada, las palmas de la mano contra el suelo. Mis dedos marcan depresiones en tu talle, donde se anudan hileras de perlas, ceñido las nalgas y los senos.” Ibid, 246. Emphasis original.

*Wearing a turban, a bearded warrior, his mouth open in a guffaw,
penetrates a mare with a member that is as big as horse's; his
companion, perched on a scaffold, covers his face in jest; someone
else drinks wine from a conch shell.*²⁵²

*My head on the ground, my feet facing up, my sex erect, each of my
arms between the legs of a naked woman: my ringed fingers
penetrate them.*²⁵³

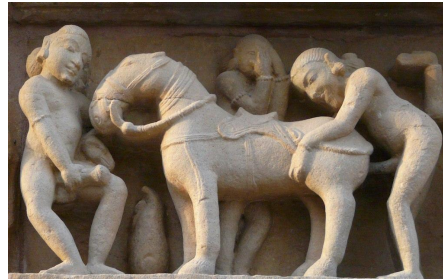


Figure 3: Sarduy's Vision of Khajuraho

Earlier in the novel, Cobra proposes touring India and making notes on Khajuraho as part of a plan to open a new *Féerie Orientale* drag show.²⁵⁴ Couldn't this incomplete (but nevertheless incontrovertible) citation of the friezes at Khajuraho be precisely these notes? By juxtaposing photos with each of the passages above, I hope it has become fairly obvious how literal these citations of India are within the "Diario Indio." At the same time, the absence of context and the oscillation between first, second, and third person seem to suggest an intentional obfuscation on Sarduy's part. Thus, while Cooppan is absolutely wrong in characterizing Sarduy's representation of India as "fantastic" in the sense of "not based in reality," she is absolutely right to react skeptically to the *enforced* hallucinatory quality of Sarduy's decontextualized and purposefully disorienting narrative strategy.

²⁵² "Con el turbante puesto, un guerrero bigotudo, la boca abierta en una carcajada, penetra una yegua con un miembro tan gordo como el de un caballo; su compañero encaramado en una tarima, burlón, se tapa la cara; otro bebe vino en una concha." Ibid. Emphasis original.

²⁵³ "La cabeza contra el suelo, los pies hacia arriba, el sexo erecto, cada uno de mis brazos entre las piernas de una mujer desnuda: las penetran mis dedos anillados." Ibid. Emphasis original.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 60-61.

Having identified the literalism suggested (and delivered) by the diary format, the question then becomes, obfuscation to what end?

As we read above, Sarduy agrees with Paz that India presents a challenge to perception, what both of them term an “enigma.” The word “enigma” as it reaches both English and Spanish, has its origins in the Greek *ainissesthai*, meaning allusive speech.²⁵⁵ That is, at its root an enigma is already a kind of language that refers to something else, that speaks metaphorically. In both *El mono gramático* and *Cobra*, Paz and Sarduy use the order of narration to produce this “enigmatic” feeling of reference in the Indian landscape. As we saw above, Paz writes an imaginative version of Hanuman in section 8, only to recall it with an incomplete citation of the Valmiki Ramayana in section 10. The ordering of these passages implies that the second follows the first temporally, when, of course, the opposite is true. In the same vein, Sarduy poses scenes throughout *Cobra*, such as the tantric rituals that precede (textually) the literalist scenes of Khajuraho, or the encounter with Rosa la Vidente in a previous section, “Eat Flowers!” that is repeated in the encounter with the Great Lama in “Diario Indio.” These repetitions make it seem as if everything we see in India has a metaphorical or allusive dimension, since all of it refers back to earlier incidents in the text. And yet, just as in the case of *El mono gramático*, the citations of India were collected first, and the imaginative reflections in the text built up around them. The construction of each text in fact guarantees that literal description will be read as an allusive enigma by predicting its reference within the text.

Committed as they are to the “enigmatic” nature of India, Paz and Sarduy use partial citation and predictive allusion to reproduce for the audience the disorientation of their own first encounters with India. “Diario Indio” in particular, I want to suggest, reproduces the “externalidad sin más” that Sarduy believes it is possible for the typical western visitor to India to see. Of course, we can easily diagnose both authors’ commitment to textual strategies that *enforce* this understanding of India as Orientalist. By temporarily bracketing that reading, however, I think we can recover an interesting move toward solidarity within the “Diario Indio,” one which critiques the very mode of seeing it seems to produce.

²⁵⁵ “Enigma,” Oxford Dictionaries, Oxford University Press.
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/enigma.

To do this we must recall that the explicit textual referent within the “Diario Indio” is a document of the same name produced by Christopher Columbus upon his arrival to the Caribbean. Sarduy even places a partial citation of Columbus’ *Indian Diary* in the midst of his own.²⁵⁶ In this page-long citation, Sarduy includes the line “There were dogs that never barked,” another example of an historical citation (the real referent) that is situated *after* its imaginative repetition in the new text, “the dogs barked in a different way.”²⁵⁷ So then, what commentary does Sarduy offer by inviting the comparison between Columbus’s text and his own?

Cooppan is in good company among scholars who suggest that Columbus’ misrecognition of the Antilles as the Indies created what we might call a “psychic” connection between the two regions. She goes on to argue that Sarduy recasts India as Cuba via Columbus in order to express his melancholic longing for the former. In this reading, I retain the idea, common to several Latin American sojourner writings, of such a “psychic connection,” but suggest a different reading of the juxtaposition. In fact, a surface reading of Sarduy’s “Diario Indio” demonstrates that the most literal representation of a foreign landscape, when rendered partially, without adequate context, produces a sense of the fantastic even when its constitutive parts are mostly real. Perhaps what he performs in the “Indian Diary” is the tendency of all people to begin with an fantastic understanding of their initial confrontation with otherness. India and Cuba are connected in the process of misrecognition not because that process overlays one on top of the other, as Cooppan would have it, but because they are both victims of a similarly warped perspective. The exoticism of the representation is itself a performance and a critique. At its heart, this is the distinction Sarduy suggests between viewing India as “*exterioridad sin más*” – that is, taking seriously the first impressions recorded in the “Diario Indio” – and comprehending the “*pleno espesor*” of a surface, which involves understanding it for what it is – a simulation which, while hiding no underlying truth, is, itself, also unreal.

²⁵⁶ Sarduy, *Cobra*, 236.

²⁵⁷ “Había perros que jamás ladraron.” Ibid, 236; “Los perros ladran de otro modo.” Ibid, 232.

BÁEZ

Brujo haitiano brujo colombiano
brujo de las matas
Rooms for rent GED ESL free classes
smokeshop 24 hours calls 39 cents a minute
STD ISD PCO STD ISD PCO
fax to let **best of both worlds**
for hire please sound horn veg. Non veg.
Hotel Fresh tickets²⁵⁸

In the work of Josefina Báez, we see again the style of incomplete citation that unites sojourner projects. Yet critics have generally received Báez's use of Indian culture very differently than that of other sojourners like Sarduy or Paz. This section traces her use of incomplete citation in two works, the performance piece *Dominicanish* and the book of poetry *Cardamom and Other Spices*, to suggest why this might be so, and, in the process, how justified this distinction might be.

Dominicanish is a piece about Báez's hybrid identity as a Dominican immigrant to the United States, specifically the Dominican neighborhood of Washington Heights in New York. It combines a pun-filled script written at the interstices of English and Spanish with physical movements that are mostly adapted from the South Indian dance style of *kuchipudi*. According to the "Frontispiece" written by Silvio Torres Sillant, the inclusion of Indian citations within the text help distinguish *Dominicanish* from "binary representations of ethnicity which authors often use when speaking about their identity."²⁵⁹ He further contends that the inclusion of the Indian tradition allows Báez to "open" an otherwise "exclusive" definitions of self that arise in diasporic communities. In the "Pretexto" (notably *not* a translation of the English-medium "Frontispiece") Torres Saillant goes on to emphasize that within *Dominicanish* the "the experiences accumulated by Báez in Andhara [sic] Pradesh, a region in the south-east of India, harmonize - *because they must harmonize* - with the everyday education received by an immigrant in her contact with the city of New

²⁵⁸ Josefina Báez, *Dominicanish: A Performance Text* (New York: Josefina Báez, 2000), 24. Emphasis original.

²⁵⁹ Silvio Torres Sillant, "Frontispiece," in Báez, *Dominicanish*, 13.

York.”²⁶⁰ On the one hand, then, Torres Saillant understands India as an interruptive force which prevents *Dominicanish* from being just another piece of U.S. immigrant literature. On the other hand, India is a uniting force, something that harmonizes (that *must* harmonize) with the pre-established melody of immigrant life in the United States. How does India accomplish this janus-faced epistemological labor? And what should its invocation in this dual role tell us about how to interpret the (for now suspended) politics of Báez and the other sojourners in this chapter?

Again, in order to address these questions, it is important to first return to a surface reading of Báez’s work, one that identifies how India functions as a referent within the text of *Dominicanish*. Like Sarduy and Paz, Báez uses the style of incomplete citation to describe Indian cultural products both within the text of *Dominicanish* and in the embodied aspects of the performance. Unlike those authors, she also uses incomplete citation as a way of describing her other two locations (NYC and the Dominican Republic). We see this in the lines above, which seem to combine citations from a New York street scene (GED ESL free classes) with the same type of citations from India (STD ISD PCO).²⁶¹

Unlike Paz’s invocation of the *Ramayana*, the words “GED ESL free classes” do not create a sense of mystification in the audience. They do not function under the assumption that the audience has no pre-existing familiarity with the New York street scene. Quite the opposite: this scene *only* functions because the audience is assumed to recognize the context despite the incomplete citation. In this way, incomplete citation of New York and the Dominican Republic – as well as their intersection in Washington Heights – works in the same way as Báez’s linguistic code-switching. Just as the project is essentially illegible to someone who does not speak *both* English and Spanish, it is likewise opaque to someone unfamiliar with *both* primary cultural locations it references.

Yet the practice of incomplete citation, which Báez enforces equally in all three cultural contexts in *Dominicanish*, nevertheless produces totally different results when applied to India. This is because while members of the Dominican diaspora (or other US

²⁶⁰ “Experiencias recogidas por Báez en Andhara [sic] Pradesh, una región en el sure-este de la India, armonizan –porque tienen que armonizar– con la educación cotidiana que recibe el inmigrante en su contacto diario con la ciudad de Nueva York.” Ibid, 16. Emphasis added.

²⁶¹ A common sign on call offices, which stands for “Subscribers Trunk Dialing – International Subscribers Dialing – Public Call Office.”

Latino communities) might reasonably be expected to have the bilingual and bi-cultural facilities to interpret Báez's work, the same community would generally not be expected to have an equivalent familiarity with India. In this sense, Báez's partial citation of the Indian landscape makes the same kind of assumptions and enforces the same kind of confusion on her audience as do Sarduy and Paz.

What is the purpose of this disorientation? We might read it as merely incidental. After all, if Báez uses the same representational strategy for all cultural location, that could merely be evidence of her stylistic consistency. And if we take *Dominicanish* to be merely an autobiographical performance, then the inclusion of Indian features is simply another aspect of Báez's own experience. However, I suggest we understand her continuation of the style of incomplete citation in India to constitute a strategy of intentional disorientation consistent with that of Sarduy and Paz. Let us recall that Sarduy and Paz used incomplete citation in order to cultivate the perception of India as an "enigma" and, more importantly, to reproduce their own initial sense of disorientation there. *Dominicanish* fundamentally concerns process of negotiating a new cultural and linguistic environment in the process of immigrating to the United States. Much of the piece therefore describes Báez's early struggles to learn English, her incipient solidarity with African American communities, and her adaptation to the diaspora community of New York. Formal features of the piece ensure that her primary audience also belong to that community (or others like it) and therefore share these coordinates of experience. These same features ensure that her descriptions of immigration evoke nostalgia and identification, but also dampen the ability of these anecdotes to reproduce the visceral disorientation of the initial immigration experience. The total unfamiliarity of the Indian references within *Dominicanish* restores this latter feature.

We should certainly note the parallel between the incomplete citation of the Indian landscape within the text of the piece and Báez's incomplete citation of the Andhra dance style kuchipudi in her performance. The relationship between immigration and embodiment is, of course, an essential theme within *Dominicanish*. We need only think of the opening where Báez says "I thought that I would never learn English/ No way I will not put my mouth like that ... **Gosh** to pronounce one little phrase one must become another

person with the mouth all twisted.”²⁶² Yet the texts includes not only the assumption of a mouth that can pronounce English and a body that can perform American identity, but one that also speaks about and performs Indian embodiment. Description of a sari, starched and pinned,²⁶³ rub up against the bangles and bindis she wears (on the same body with bantu knots) as part of her performance. In the same way, she subtly rehashes her discomfort of speaking in English “with the mouth all twisted” in a reference to learning the Indian musical scale, or “sargam.”

Sa Ri Ga Ma
Pa Da Ni Sa
Baseball has been
very very very good to me
Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Da Ni Sa
Baseball has been very very
very good to me
But **you see**
There's no guarantee
Now I'm another person
Mouth twisted²⁶⁴

Sargam plays a central role in teaching Indian music, most disciplines of which have little history of written tradition. Learning to sing or play in these traditions (and, by extension, learning to dance) constitute a radically different form of embodiment that “twists” the mouth and thereby risks irrevocably transforming the self. Because this set of transformations remains foreign to the audience, unlike the transition from Spanish to English, the risks to the self are more acutely felt.

Of course, the most obvious form of Indian embodiment within *Dominicanish* is Báez's use of kuchipudi dance tropes in the performance of the piece. These are so essential to the meaning of *Dominicanish* that the printed version of the script includes photos of Báez on the lower righthand corner of each, reproducing in a “flipbook” stop motion style her movements through several kuchipudi forms. But how legible are these movements to the audience at which they are directed?

²⁶² Báez, *Dominicanish*, 22. Emphasis original.

²⁶³ Ibid, 37.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 47. Emphasis original.

In “A Dominican York in Andhra,” Ramón Rivera Servera consistently emphasizes the illegibility of Báez’s kuchipudi tropes for her audience. “The correspondence between kuchipudi and Báez’s performance process... remains, for the most part, obscured from the spectator.”²⁶⁵ “The gestural phrases [of kuchipudi] do not register semiotically for the audience, which is composed primarily of theatre spectators without knowledge of kuchipudi’s language.”²⁶⁶ Instead, Rivera Servera emphasizes, as I have above, that the primary purpose of the Indian elements in *Dominicanish* is to create a sense of distance or estrangement, one that both refocuses the audience’s attention (his reading) and recreates the initial alienation of the immigrant experience by recasting it in a truly foreign location (mine). Like the verbal invocation of “STD ISD PCO,” her physical performance depends precisely on the *inability* of most of the audience to access these layers of meaning. It suggests, instead, that these movements should be merely recognizable for their “Indian-ness” in the same way as were Sarduy’s invocations of “elephant gods, garlanded bulls, beggars [and] mystics.” Maybe not even that. Perhaps they are valuable simply for their *foreignness* and their associated capacity to produce estrangement.

Although he also illuminates moments when Báez’s Indian dance style reinforces or complicates the message of her text, the focus of Rivera Servera’s piece is the contrast between the kuchipudi tropes her occasional insertions of “vernacular” African American or Caribbean dance steps. Following Henry Louis Gates Jr, Rivera Servera identifies the contrast between Báez’s use of kuchipudi and her invocation of “vernacular” forms as a type of resistance to dominant culture called “Signifying.”²⁶⁷ “These insertions [of vernacular movement] Signify against the dominant movement pattern of the piece. Thus the body in movement performs an act of decolonization by reinscribing the vernacular, the language with which the marginalized community historically identifies.”²⁶⁸

However, this interpretation ignores the fact that the Indian culture from which Báez adapts her version of kuchipudi *in no way* stands in a dominant position vis-a-vis African American or Afro-Caribbean culture, and thus is not an appropriate target for the

²⁶⁵ Ramón Rivera-Servera, “A Dominican York in Andhra,” in *Caribbean Dance from Abakuá to Zouk: How Movement Shapes Identity*, ed. Susanna Sloat (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 155.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 156.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 157.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 161.

“resistance” implied by Signifying. Rivera Servera’s recourse to “Signification” thus reintroduces the thorny issues that arise when theories built around binary power structures are invoked to describe relations between different groups of “tactical actors.” While the first part of this chapter has pushed back against the simplistic application of Orientalism to writing about India by (phenotypically white, male) Latin American sojourners, in Báez’s case the opposite issue emerges. Her position as a clearly minoritized figure within American culture (Afro-descended, Latina, woman) leads Rivera Servera and other critics all too easily to a reading of her portrayals of Indian culture as empowered (not only “decolonizing” but, elsewhere, “feminist”). The fact remains, however, that Báez’s minority status within her culture(s) of origin lend her claim to Indian culture no more pre-given ontological legitimacy than that of Sarduy or Paz. Indeed, bracketing the politics of their respective social positions and producing a “surface” reading of texts by all three authors has revealed that Báez takes recourse to precisely the same obscurantist representational strategy as her white, male Latin American counterparts. Without the presence of a stable binary between “dominator” and “dominated”, what is the distinction between Signifying, which we applaud, and appropriation, which we abhor?

Of course the purpose of bracketing these binary readings has not been to bring them crashing back down at the end. Instead, what I want to emphasize here is that Rivera-Servera’s relatively simplistic idea of Signifying *against* kuchipudi runs counter to Báez’s own much more thoughtful musings on the portability of her minority status in India. For her more nuanced view, let us turn to her book of poetry *Cardamom and Other Spices* (2005). Like *Dominicanish*, the collection ricochets between New York, the Dominican Republic and India. Yet, in this later book, Báez explicitly addresses her non-binary, sometimes-dominant /sometimes-dominated position as a visitor to India. Báez actively re-conceives of herself as a different kind of minority in different contexts, with different relations to others than in the United States. In “That Sunday,” for instance, she casts herself as “aloof in my foreigner’s character.”²⁶⁹ Yet in the subsequent poem, “In the presence of a dance Guru,” her foreignness retreats, replaced by that specter from chapter one, the artist’s

²⁶⁹ “Aloof” here carries a heavy negative inflection from previous poems, including “Agra to Hyderabad,” cited below. Josefina Báez, *Cardamom and Other Spices*, (Alexandria: Alexander Street Press, 2005), 10.

“perfect understanding”: “An ordinary phrase becomes an extraordinary song/ Harmonized in Telegu understood perfectly in/ Spanish.”²⁷⁰ In “I have become a fashion victim,” Báez describes a scene of Indian embodiment that “transformed me into a Goddess.”²⁷¹ But for the most complete consideration of the intersection of identities that Báez confronts in India, let us look at the full text of a poem that describes a typical Indian scene, the long-distance train, in “From Agra to Hyderabad.”

From Agra to Hyderabad

He looked at me. He looked into my eyes. He looked and smiled. In fact, he was the only one using his eyes truly. Dressed in a very bright yellow sari, his face portrayed a harshness absent in his eyes. Suddenly, the eunuch sat next to me. And holding my hands he told me what I already knew. “Nobody like us here. And you and me are happily alive”. While he loudly said the obvious, a voice translated the fact. It was the voice of that civil engineer that I met buying oranges in the station. A soft voice in the middle of this crowded train heading down to the south. Down to meet the Indian Ocean. He who said that is not safe for a woman to travel by herself these days. He was the echo of the action. A monotone voice. Like a prayer. Not looking at me. Not looking at anybody. But translated the eunuch strident anthem of truth. My intense friend laughed to end his phrases. He laughed so thunderous that badly hurt the cowards, the racists and the dishonest traveling in the train accompanied with their aloofness. His bangles cheered his unveiling act. He left as he came. Then, I stared at the window. Passing thru, looking at a group of squatting men shitting, women setting cow dung to dry and children running. I felt asleep. I arrived full and filled with stories. I arrived to continue my story.²⁷²

“From Agra to Hyderabad” describes Báez’s encounter with a *hijra*, commonly translated, as Báez does here, as “eunuch,” although more accurately a transgender or intersex individual with ritual significance in Indian culture. The encounter is an occasion for Báez to think about the way traveling through India causes her to reevaluate the axis of

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 11.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid, 8-9.

her difference. While linguistic difference and racial difference are the main axes explored in *Dominicanish*, in this poem it is initially sexual difference that most obviously sets Báez apart from the others on the train. Hence, “not safe for a woman to travel by herself these days,” as a man tells her on the platform in Agra. Femaleness is something she at once shares and does not share with the *hijra*, a metaphor for the way that her own dimensions of minority status are troubled by the journey to (and through) India.

In *Dominicanish*, Báez takes the confused syntax and unintentional homonyms that arise in the movement between Spanish and English, and transforms into intentionally clever, multivalent statements. Yet here, it is not her but the *hijra* whose non-standard English produces such multiplicity: “Nobody like us here,” a sentence whose incompleteness creates the opportunity for two divergent readings. Does the *hijra* intend “Nobody like[s] us here,” a description of their shared position as victims of animus that comes from “the cowards, the racists, the dishonest traveling in the train accompanied with their aloofness?” Or does she mean “[There is] nobody like us here,” meaning that s/he and Báez share an ontological status as minorities, even if their precise type of minoritization is distinct? In either case, Báez’s journey through India produces the opportunity for new solidarities and new understandings of her minority position that would not have been available in a context closer to home.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of this chapter, I have used “surface reading” to illuminate the shared representational strategy by which Latin American sojourners used fragmented but highly literal descriptions of the South Asian landscape to reproduce for their audiences the initial sense of estrangement they experienced in India. As I suggested in the introduction, this strategy of estrangement could be seen to further discourses identified by Said and Suleri about India’s fundamentally inscrutable nature, and thus could plausibly be analyzed as Orientalist. However, bracketing Orientalism as *the* appropriate conceptual framework from which to understand Sojourner writing allows us to explore alternative readings that may recover partial solidarities between these writers and their Asian environments.

On what grounds to Latin American sojourners build those solidarities? Often, on productive, even intentional misunderstandings, the kind that are furthered by the

obscurantist style through which sojourners approach India. In *Cobra*, Sarduy uses Columbus' mistake *par excellence* to suggest a political connection between Cuba and India, both victims of European colonialist expansion, and both subject to simplistic and exoticizing modes of seeing. In his subsequent novel, *Maitreya*, he furthers this idea by using reincarnation as a tool to connect the plight of Tibet and Cuba under the contemporary expansion of Communism. Paz does something similar when he briefly suggests a connection between, on the one hand, the conquest of Latin America and the Spanish Reconquista, and, on the other, the expansion of the Mughal empire into India. Although each of these moves requires a certain historical imprecision, they also offer a politically valuable reinterpretation of world history. Most striking of all, the political projects within sojourner representations of India harmonize with South Asian authors' recourse to Iberian and Latin American history as an allegory for modern India and Pakistan.²⁷³

Given the potential for sojourner strategies of representation to both further *and* undermine stereotype, and given the corresponding representational strategies among South Asian authors describing *hispanidad*, it may be useful to move away from the appellation of Orientalism to these authors and toward an understanding of their projects as a (sometimes) "strategic exoticism." In *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Graham Huggan defines strategic exoticism as "the means by which postcolonial writers/thinkers, working from within exoticist codes of representation, either manage to subvert those codes... or succeed in redeploying them for the purposes of uncovering differential relations of power."²⁷⁴ Yet here, again, is the same problematic that inheres to the adaptation of relations between strategic and tactical actors in de Certeau's theory of mass culture, or between East and West in Orientalism, or between majority and minority culture in "Signifying." While the power relation between Huggan's "postcolonial writers/thinkers" and their implied audience is a tidy vertical binary, the relation between Latin Americans and South Asians is, if not a perfect horizontal line, at most a shallow incline.

As we saw in the *Parallels* section of this project, writers from these two areas often faced the same kind of oppression from similarly situated actors in the global north. As we have seen above, sojourner writing often obliquely references such shared oppressions,

²⁷³ See, for example, Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, or Intizar Hussain's *Āge Samundar Hai*.

²⁷⁴ Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 32.

even in the midst of problematic representations of the subcontinent. A reparative reading makes space for these solidarities to emerge without overwriting other moments at which they fail. It thereby preserves the complex relations between tactical actors who do not stand not quite above or below, and not quite side by side, but who proceed on parallel journeys over the same undulating path.

Chronicle of a Boom Foretold: The Rise of South Asian Literature in Light of Latin America

INTRODUCTION: A CASE OF EXPLODING MARKETS

A few pages from the end of Mohammad Hanif's debut novel, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, the protagonist, a cadet in the Pakistani military, urges his friend Obaid to disembark with him from the plane that will carry President Mohammad Zia al Haq back to the capital. Obaid refuses, preferring to remain absorbed in a novel that he, like us, is pages away from finishing. Minutes later the ill-fated plane explodes, just as we knew it would from the beginning of Hanif's book. Among the charred remains left to the protagonist are a few scraps of his friend's fatal novel, an English translation of Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* [*Crónica de una muerte anunciada*].

Hanif's novel, and the corpus of recent Anglophone South Asian fiction to which it belongs, is likewise caught up in its own version of a predictable story: the Chronicle of a Boom Foretold. And yet, like Obaid moments before his own demise, scholars perusing this chronicle follow the line of their fate blissfully unaware that it has all been set out in advance. In the chapter that follows, I show how the Latin American literary "Boom" of the 1960s and the current explosion of Anglophone South Asian fiction are actually products of the same set of agents in an increasingly transnational literary market. Many of the same mechanisms that brought Latin American Boom literature onto the world stage in the 1960s and eventually delivered it to audiences in South Asia – thus making possible the homage in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* – now impact what I will be calling the South Asian "Boom."

It has been fairly easy for scholars to recognize the intertextual traces of these circulations in the literature itself. After all, authors like Hanif point to their Latin American influences explicitly. Yet it has been surprisingly difficult for those same scholars to recognize confluences in the larger systems that make those exchanges possible. Even while their subjects have explicitly referenced Latin American literature, scholars have written about the South Asian literary explosion without reference to its historical precedent, or the

large, well developed and rigorously argued body of theory about the same phenomenon in Latin America.²⁷⁵

This results in more than an innocent duplication of effort. It actually distorts our understanding of the engines that drive Boom phenomena. As we shall see with regard to Graham Huggan and the Booker Prize in Section Three, too short of a temporal window disrupts our perception of the pattern; the larger our timeframe, the more clearly the pattern emerges. In re-associating the Latin American and South Asian Booms as two successive instances of the same principle, we dramatically increase the timeframe and the amount of data from which to accurately identify a pattern. Moreover, popular publishing is not the only arena to experience “Booms.” Reading across forty years of scholarship allows us to correct somewhat for the way academic trends direct attention to one or another Boom engine in a given period.

But I am not merely or even primarily interested in understanding the “how” of Boom trends. As such, this essay does not offer any single definitive answer to the question “what drives literary Booms,” although it does adjudicate certain claims within that larger question. Instead, my interest is captured by a curious fact: behind almost all of these theories about *how Booms work* is a much larger question about *why* they work. Why do writers produce certain kinds of narratives, and why do readers like them so much? Within these relatively innocent questions, moreover, lurk fraught issues of representation, exploitation, authenticity, political commitment and other categories through which contemporary literary scholars approach the ethics of their object. Getting a clearer hold on the Boom pattern itself thus allows us to see where certain actors have received undo blame, and others have escaped scrutiny altogether.

²⁷⁵ Priya Joshi is one of the few scholars of South Asian Anglophone Boom fiction to suggest the relationship between the markets for Latin American Boom Literature and Indian literature “after Midnight” (as she refers to Anglophone Indian literature written after Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*). “Rather than reading [novels like *Midnight’s Children*] and the literary phenomenon they generated as isolated incidents, this chapter demonstrates the extent to which this development (akin to the Boom in the Spanish American novel of the 1960s and 1970s) is part of the category of world literature and can best be understood from that perspective.” However, what this chapter will argue is that the categorization of both textual bodies as “world literature” is too loose to suggest what exactly makes literature from these two areas and eras act as “kin.” Priya Joshi, *In Another Country* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 234.

Much of “Cartographies of Engagement” has concerned transnational exchanges that arose through Latin American and South Asian authors’ pursuit of connection and support in the era just before the mass “professionalization” of literary authorship I will be describing here. Again, following Ángel Rama, I use “professionalization” to mean the ability of authors to support themselves exclusively through work related to their literary achievements – advances and royalties most obviously, but also university teaching appointments, speaking engagements, and writing grants.²⁷⁶ As I have shown, before the 1960s, when this type of professionalization was more rare, the pursuit of other types of paid support produced unexpected transnational encounters between these two otherwise unassociated regions. For South Asians and Latin Americans, the translation of these experiences into literary form demonstrated both the profound desire for solidarity and the profound risk inherent in cross-cultural representation.

By the later part of the twentieth century, however, first Latin American and then South Asian authors “professionalized,” aided in no small part by Boom trends that created the huge international audiences for their work. The poetry recitals at the opening of chapter one marked a fantasy on the part of Latin American and South Asian poets about a future moment in which their literatures would regularly cross national and linguistic boundaries to produce lasting mutual influence. This final chapter suggests a history of the recent past in which that literary dream has come to pass, though not at all in the way its dreamers expected. Taking as its starting point the new type of intertextual relationships created by the successive professionalization experiences of Latin American and South Asian authors, this final chapter explores the connection between this sudden economic success and issues of representation. Issues that emerge in this instance not from the representation of a foreign other, but of an area-bounded “self.” As literary representation itself has become more suspect in scholarship since the 1990s, so have Boom trends and the writers who materially benefit from them.²⁷⁷

This chapter builds on the previous one in its efforts to pushing back against the “hermeneutics of suspicion” that have dogged interpretations of Boom stylistics by South Asianist and Postcolonial critics of the last twenty years. I do not, however, wish to fall

²⁷⁶ Rama, “El Boom en perspectiva.”

²⁷⁷ Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, 114, 127, 144.

reflexively into the opposite position, one that unequivocally valorizes the dynamics of literary Boom markets or the styles of representation they produce. In particular, as a translator and a scholar of South Asian vernacular literatures, I agree with many of those cited in this chapter that those literatures deserve a wider audience, and that publication, distribution, and education networks in South Asia should be strengthened in a way that would further that goal. Instead, by offering a broader (and, I hope, clearer) picture of the engines behind Boom markets, it is my hope that we might get a clearer sense of the political stakes not only for the Anglophone South Asian authors who currently benefit from Boom dynamics, but for vernacular authors if they should join them.

What follows is the attempt at a new historiography for literary publishing from the global south in the last fifty years. To do that, however, it is first necessary to review the existing historiography for the two “Booms” in question. I will thus begin by offering a timeline for each boom. Inspired by Neil Larsen’s meta-analysis of Boom criticism in “The Boom Novel and the Cold War in Latin America,” this chapter then traces three streams of critical discourse common to both Booms, each identifying a different category of primary actor: Creators, Curators, and Contexts.²⁷⁸ Having explored the theories associated with each category, I will suggest which explanatory modes I find most compelling, and why a more precise understanding of Boom dynamics is ever more important in a moment they seem to be taking on increasing power in the literary market.

LITERATURE IN THE TIME OF COMMODITIES

Scholars use the term “Boom” to describe a range of factors that coalesced during the 1960s to produce an efflorescence of literary production in Latin America. Very briefly,

²⁷⁸ Neil Larsen, “‘Boom’ Novel and the Cold War in Latin America,” in *Global Cold War Literatures Western, Eastern and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Ed. Andrew Hammond (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2011). Larsen’s three streams are the “aestheticist,” the “vulgar marxist” and the “revolutionary historicist” explanations. In the first, observers (including the authors themselves) attribute Boom novels’ success to their embrace of certain aesthetic forms: the rise of the novel, adaptations of Euro-American modernism, incorporation of Latin American mythology and “worldview.” In the second, macroeconomic developments are wholly responsible for Latin American literature’s explosive growth: the expanding Latin American middle class, changes in national and international publishing industries, the growth of consumerism, etc. In the third, the one to which Larsen himself subscribes, political realities around the Cuban Revolution are the major engine of the Boom, simultaneously affecting the content of its novels and the way they circulated in the global marketplace.

we might define the Latin American “boom” as the period that begins in 1958 with the publication of Carlos Fuentes’ *Where the Air is Clear* [*La región más transparente*], reaches an early milestone in 1963 with Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* [*Rayuela*] and Mario Vargas Llosa’s *In the Time of the Hero* [*La ciudad y los perros*], and achieves its pinnacle in 1967 with Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* [*Cien años de soledad*], its energy then declining and becoming more diffuse after 1972. Most easily identified with the four superstar authors mentioned above, the Boom is so named not only for the rapid expansion in popularity and perceived literary quality of Latin American novels in this period, but for the concomitant rise in economic value attached to writing from this region.

What I am calling the South Asian boom has its roots in the awarding of the Mann Booker Prize to Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, which inaugurated a sea change in the global reception of Anglophone South Asian fiction in 1981.²⁷⁹ However, I argue that the Boom itself did not really emerge until a decade later, after the economic liberalization of India in 1991. For the purposes of this essay, I date the opening of the Boom to 1993 with Vikram Seth’s record-setting advance for *A Suitable Boy*, achieving its recognizable shape in 1997 with Arundhati Roy’s record-shattering bidding war and subsequent Booker win for *The God of Small Things*, and probably reaching its peak a decade later in 2008 with the Booker for Aravind Adiga’s *the White Tiger* and the Oscar for Best Picture to Danny Boyle’s *Slumdog Millionaire*. Marking out the decade between 1998 to 2008 as the “high” Boom leaves out several years of important literary work on either side. For those novels that emerged between 1991 and 1997, it is important to note that their popularity increased, sometimes significantly, after 1998, just as did writers of the so-called “pre-Boom” era in Latin America – Carpentier and Borges, for example – after 1958. Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*, for instance, was published and long-listed for the Booker in 1995. It became massively more popular, however, after Oprah named it a Book Club selection in 2001, no doubt a reflection of the increased attention toward South Asian fiction overall in that era.

²⁷⁹ Although 1981 is a universally agreed-upon “breakthrough” year for South Asian Anglophone literature, scholars like Ruvani Ranasinha and Robert Fraser date a growth in British and American scholarly attention to South Asian and African Anglophone literature to educational initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s. This alternative historiography will be addressed in the “Curators” section below. Ruvani Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Robert Fraser, *Book History Through Postcolonial Eyes: Rewriting the Script* (London: Routledge, 2008).

For the sake of argument, I will speculate that mainstream Euro-American excitement about South Asian cultural products probably reached its peak in 2008. Nevertheless, we continue to see explosively successful books coming from South Asian authors six years hence, while academic interest and professionalization in these fields has arguably only continued to expand. Yet this does not necessarily indicate that the “Boom” itself remains ongoing, as we can see with reference to the Latin American case. It is important to recall that the “post-boom” period of the 1970s and early eighties included a sustained, though more aesthetically and politically diffuse, outside interest in Latin American cultural production. Moreover, the growth in academic programs in Latin American Studies and Spanish and Portuguese Literature, begun as part of the Boom the middle sixties, continues to impact the size and prestige of these programs even today. Thus, if postcolonial studies and “global English” programs positioned to study Anglophone South Asian fiction continue to grow institutionally, that does not contradict the idea that the Boom itself has concluded.

But who or what is the “trendsetter” in these successive booms? Among those mentioned above, there are three broad categories we will be exploring in the sections below. The first category of trendsetters are the “Creators.” Creator theories hold that Latin American authors succeeded in the global market primarily by adopting stylistic innovations and subject matters that found a niche among Euro-American audiences. While earlier incarnations of this theory celebrated the creativity of such innovation and the potential for solidarity enacted by international stylistic borrowing, invocations of Creator theories around the South Asian Boom have mostly viewed these tendencies in a negative light.

More frequently, South Asian Boom scholars have emphasized a second set of theories around “Contexts,” which suggest the role of macro-level actors to produce the intertwined economic and political conditions under which a certain kind of literature becomes more appealing, more accessible, or both. Such factors include government policies and funding priorities, disciplinary shifts in academia, demographic shifts in readership, changes in global market flows, and both hard and soft diplomacy. However, in the case of South-Asia specific scholarship, most “Context” arguments have focused on highly contentious issues around language of composition. It is also important to remember

that while some of these Contexts have always been somewhat available for study – statistics about reading publics and sales figures – other materials, for instance those linking the Latin American literature to Cold War diplomacy, have only recently been declassified, and their availability can be clearly associated with new trends in the study of the Latin American Boom. We will see the significance of this fact on studies of the South Asian Boom later in the piece.

Finally, “Curator” theories suggest that a few key micro-level players set the macro-level terms of the literary game. Curators are highly talented, insightful or influential individuals or small collectives, including editors at publishing houses, the conveners and juries of literary prizes, conference organizers, translators and other kinds of literary patrons and advocates.²⁸⁰ These theories, which do have a role to play in explanations of the Latin American Boom, have become much more prominent in the South Asian Boom. While, I argue, academic trends have significantly influenced the relative amount of credit given to Creators versus Contexts, the increasing theoretical prominence of this third group is probably most closely associated with the real growth in this category of actors over the course of the last 50 years.

CREATORS

As Larsen argues, it is from the realm of aesthetic explanations that that we receive the most celebratory accounts of the Latin American Boom. The influence of Creators and their stylistic choices have remained a popular unit of analysis in part because they are so

²⁸⁰ My use of the term “Curator” differs notably from Emily Apter’s designation in *Against World Literature*. She writes “World Literature, institutionally speaking, increasingly resembles the global museum in its practice of curatorial salvage,” adding that “in this scheme, the salvaged text is effectively signed over to the critic who is now, properly speaking, a curator, charged with conserving it and appraising its worth.” There are two issues to address here. In the first place, Apter is focused mostly on the retroactive designation of “classics” of World Literature, and thus frames the curator as museum functionary who “salvages” certain artifacts of the past. In contrast, my use of the term focuses on the sorting through of contemporary literature, and thus frames the curator as something like a gallery owner who directs attention to emerging talent. Second, the metaphorical role of the curator in Apter’s writing is explicitly tied to the imperial project of museum making based on a traffic in the antiquities of subjugated lands. As we shall see below, this metaphor perhaps too tidily and too damningly associates contemporary global flows of literature with imperialism, precluding the possibility that there might be more ethically ambiguous or even redeemable motives that inform audience interest in Boom narratives. Apter, *Against World Literature*, 327.

easy to trace across space and time. Stylistic ties remain visible where other forms of influence – economic, political, or otherwise – do not. Moreover, as we saw in chapters three and four, literary scholars, as avid readers, are primed to recognize intertextual influence; indeed authors often cue them to do so, highlighting such influence to mark their work out as “literary.” It is thus not surprising that the Creator category is the only one in which Latin American and South Asian Boom fictions have been consistently associated.

Moreover, while Curator and Context theories depend on a scholar’s ability to analyze one or another type of extra-literary data, Creator explanations have the advantage of centering on the expertise for which most literary scholars are best trained. Finally, even the best-argued studies about the relationship between literature and extra-literary factors may only produced circumstantial evidence, while explicit citation between texts is something more like a smoking gun. It is initially surprising to discover, therefore, that Creator theories have become progressively less popular as explanations for either Boom. At the same time the tone of scholarship that explains the appeal of certain literary styles and traces their transnational genealogies has gone from laudatory to suspicious and even condemning.

Before we explore when and why this change occurred, let us take a moment to name some of the stylistic features that Creator theories trace and follow them as they move through successive Booms. Hanif’s novel is a good point from which to begin exploring the aesthetic connections between the “Boom” in which he is participating and its Latin American predecessor. The afterword to *Exploding Mangoes* credits the influence of two late-career novels by authors who rose to prominence in the Latin American Boom. García Márquez’s 1981 novella, mentioned above, provides the narrative structure in which a murder is revealed at the beginning and the plot returns to an earlier moment to explore the details of how it was carried out. Vargas Llosa’s *Feast of the Goat* [*La fiesta del chivo*] (2000) suggests the particular plot –the assassination of a dictator in a peripheral country with deep but ambivalent ties to the United States – as well as the multiple narrative viewpoints from which that plot is observed. All three narratives play with ideas of prophecy, fate, and fatalism that may be considered to play into exoticist fantasies about the Global South.

In these books, as in their earlier novels, García Márquez and Vargas Llosa owe a deep stylistic debt to William Faulkner, a debt that is then transferred onto Hanif. This multi-generational legacy becomes even clearer in the writing of other South Asian authors. Rushdie's 1983 novel *Shame*, which also concerns the rise and fall of Zia al Huq, even more clearly relies on tropes about dark genealogical secrets, multi-generational feuds, and the last remnants of once-great families shut up in within once-great houses at the edge of civilization. All of these can be clearly traced back to Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* by way of Boom novels like García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

The outsized influence of Faulkner on the Latin American Boom is such an acknowledged commonplace that it has become the object of parody.²⁸¹ As such, following Faulknerian criticism in the Latin American Boom can be a useful heuristic for gathering a representative sample of Creator scholarship. Gerald Martin's foundational *Journeys through the Labyrinth*, and Pascale Casanova's controversial but important *The World Republic of Letters*, Deborah Cohn's "He Was One of Us: The Reception of William Faulkner and the US South by Latin American Authors," and Larson in "The Boom Novel and the Cold War in Latin America," share broad outlines in the argument about Faulkner's influence on Boom-era literature. They suggest that Latin American authors of the midcentury recognized their own experiences in Faulkner's stylistic and thematic concerns and not in those of his more cosmopolitan modernist peers. His attention to regional difference, his sense of society in decay, of a place left to its own devices on the margins, these features spoke to the realities of Latin America. At the same time, his stylistic innovations offered a path out of dominant strains of social realism in Latin American writing of the forties and fifties, what Casanova describes without irony as a "literary liberation."²⁸²

²⁸¹ In the Argentinian author Ricardo Piglia's 1982 novel *Respiración Artificial* [*Artificial Respiration*], the implied author of the text, Emilio Renzi, disparages his own debut novel as nothing more than a recapitulation of Faulkner's 1939 novella *The Wild Palms*, a text that, famously, was translated into Spanish the following year by fellow Argentinian and Boom-progenitor, Borges. Piglia's playful disavowal of that text and its tradition is not only a disavowal of Faulkner in 1939 and Borges in 1940, but also, pointedly, of the missing link in the genealogy that connects them to his own writing: the Boom authors of the 1960s. Ricardo Piglia, *Respiración artificial* (Buenos Aires: Seix Barral, 1994).

²⁸² Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 344.

From that general agreement, Martin's work pursues close readings that demonstrate the way various authors elaborated Faulkner's legacy, Cohn focuses on the development of hemispheric solidarities, and Casanova and Larson's arguments turns toward the way that the embracing a member of the Euro-American avant garde helped condition the acceptance of Boom literature within the European cultural center. However, while Casanova celebrates this development, Larsen deplores it. Citing arguments by Lawrence Schwartz and Barbara Foley, Larsen asserts that Faulkner's canonization was part of Cold War efforts to delegitimize socially engaged literature in favor of apolitical modernist experimentation. By extension, the Faulknerian style defanged politically radical Boom authors at the same time that it helped them toe the line with the more conservative Euro-American readership.²⁸³

In sum, all four scholars identify the same literary genealogy, and broadly agree on the relationship of that genealogy to the increased traction enjoyed by Boom-era novels in the Euro-American literary market. The distinction comes in their judgement of that relationship – positive and creatively “liberating” according to Martin and Casanova, ambivalent in the case of Cohn, and strongly negative in the case of Larson. What I want to emphasize, however, is that none of these authors suggest that Faulkner, *because* he is a North American author, is an inappropriate model for Latin American authors, or that it is inappropriate for Latin American authors to openly aspire, via Faulknerian stylistics, to success with a Euro-American audience. Even when Larson uses the obvious debt to Faulkner to condemn the stylistic achievement of the Latin American Boom, he does so based on divergent politics, not issues of “authenticity.”²⁸⁴ Yet authenticity has become precisely the grounds upon which Creator theories of the South Asian Boom have staked their most scathing critiques.

²⁸³ This line of argument could be fruitfully read in concert with Lawrence Venuti's analysis of the reception in English translation of Italian author Giovannino Guareschi at the height of Cold War anti-communist sentiments in the United States (1998, 124-158). Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards and Ethics of Difference* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1998); Larsen, “‘Boom’ Novel and the Cold War in Latin America,” 100-101.

²⁸⁴ The recent edited volume *TransLatin Joyce* extends earlier scholarship by scholars like Martin to make a similar argument about the significance of another Euro-American modernist, James Joyce, in Iberian and Latin American literature. Interestingly, these essays show that modernist influences have been decried as “inauthentic,” but mostly in popular, rather than scholarly contexts. Price, Salgado, and Schwartz, eds. *TransLatin Joyce*.

Things did not start out this way. In fact, for a time magical realism, the most clearly identifiable stylistic innovation associated with the Latin American Boom, was once all but immune to challenges to its authenticity. This is reflected in the largely positive reception of Salman Rushdie's early experiments with Latin-American-inspired, Faulkner-indebted stylistics (including but not limited to magical realism). Magical realism has its roots in German Surrealism, but its current usage develops out of the idea of *lo real maravilloso* from the preface from Alejo Carpentier's 1949 novel *The Kingdom of this World* [*El reino de este mundo*]. There, Carpentier outlines a concept whose political dimensions still have currency today: that marvellous realism (and magical realism by extension) is more apt than European literary realism for capturing the extreme reality of the global margins. This is a reality, according to Rushdie, shared between himself and other peripheral authors like García Márquez, "in which there were colossal differences between the very poor and the very rich, and not much in between; also a world bedeviled by dictators and corruption."²⁸⁵ The extremes of this reality in fact required a form of representation that seemed, from the outside, fantastic.²⁸⁶

Just as Rushdie indigenized avant-garde language games as an Indian pickling process, "chutnification," this understanding of the politics of magical realism allowed him and other South Asian authors to cast his stylistic experimentation as an authentic, contestatory mode of representing South Asian experience *against* the Euro-American center. Liberal politics and individual creativity were understood to inform their recourse to Magical Realism as a representational style; the relationship between that style and economic success was entirely incidental. In the same way that Cohn has argued Faulkner's relative marginality to the Euro-American center made him a legitimate model for Latin American authors, South Asian authors could call upon Magical Realism's foreign origins in another global periphery to underpin the legitimacy of adopting it in their own work. Critics of the 1990s, such as Wendy Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora in the 1995 anthology *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, follow this line of thought, celebrating these

²⁸⁵ Edwidge Danticat, "Gabriel García Márquez: An Appreciation," *The New Yorker*, April 18, 2014. <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/gabriel-garca-mrquez-an-appreciation>.

²⁸⁶ It may also be worth considering the parallel between such justifications of magical realism as a representational strategy and the way Latin American authors in chapter four used "strategic exoticism" to create a sense of the "fantastic" in descriptions of South Asia as a way of dealing with the assumed total unfamiliarity of their audience.

aesthetics as authentic, original, and of significant value to literature all over the world.²⁸⁷ And yet, over time the apparent market success of magical realism seems to have vitiated its “authenticity” and especially its liberal political power.²⁸⁸ Claire Squires shows that by time the South Asian Boom was truly underway in 1997, literary critics had begun to understand these same features as “derivative” and full of “gimmicks.”²⁸⁹ What is notable is that, although this particular critique is aimed at Rushdie’s Magical Realism, it arguably characterizes critical responses to *all* aesthetic choices in South Asian Boom texts. It is as if, instead of serving a variety of purposes from personal expression to political argument, the aim of literary style has been winnowed down to a single goal: to capture the market.

This returns us to the question with which we began this section: Why have Creator theories of the South Asian Boom increasingly viewed the adoption of transnational styles as a cynical manipulation of the market? Let’s begin to address that question by exploring one of the terms that critics have used to diagnose that cynicism: the gimmick. In her recent work on literary gimmicks, Sianne Ngai suggests that the gimmick is a stylistic device that becomes the victim of its own success with readers. Overly laborious and somewhat out of sync with the time in which it appears, the literary gimmick is too obvious in its desire to appeal to readers. Readers, according to Ngai, resent being “hailed” by the gimmick in no small part because they recognize how effectively it appeals to them. Essentially, according to this definition, any style can become gimmicky as soon as becomes too *visible*, as soon as its appeal to readers (ie, the market) is perceived as *intentional*.²⁹⁰

Thus, the change that has occurred in scholarship between the Latin American boom and its South Asian counterpart is not necessarily what kind of stylistic choices authors have made, but the scholarly perception of the *intention* behind those choices. Take this scathing critique of *A Suitable Boy* (the first novel of the South Asian Boom proper) by none

²⁸⁷ Lois Zamora, ed., *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

²⁸⁸ Mariano Siskind offers a useful timeline for the global spread and ultimate commodification of Magical Realism. Like Squires, below, he pinpoints the late nineties and the critique of the MacOndo group in Latin America as the definitive death of the contestatory potential of Magical Realism as an aesthetic, although he also indicates its decline into commodification over the course of the previous twenty years. Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires*.

²⁸⁹ Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 141, 145.

²⁹⁰ Sianne Ngai, “Literary Gimmicks,” presentation at School for Theory and Criticism, Cornell University, July 7, 2014.

other than Casanova herself. Having spent hundreds of pages praising Latin American authors for successfully addressing themselves to the literary judgment of Paris, garnering approval that, it just so happens, accompanies market success, Casanova excoriates the South Asian Boom novel *A Suitable Boy* precisely for its “eagerness to satisfy all the most obvious criteria of the commercially successful novel.”²⁹¹ Tellingly, it is Seth’s “eagerness” and “obvious[ness]” that makes his commercial success distasteful.

By extension, when scholars diagnose Anglophone South Asian literary styles as pandering to the “touristic,” “nostalgic,”²⁹² “ethnographic,”²⁹³ “stereotypical,”²⁹⁴ or even “pornographic”²⁹⁵ desires of foreign reading publics, they suggest a relationship of debasing service through which authors satisfy their readers’ appetites for flattery, mastery and even titillation, all overlaid with historical relations of subjugation under colonialism. This theoretical turn, what I shall be calling a “perversity discourse,” will be discussed in greater detail at the end of the following section. For Graham Huggan, Sarah Brouillette and Mrinalini Chakravorty, South Asian Anglophone authors are redeemable only to the extent that they produce such “perverse” stylistics with a strategic or ironic knowingness. The possibility that those stylistics serve other purposes, or that audiences respond to those stylistics in other ways, are not significantly elaborated. At the same time, projects that embrace the positive possibilities of South Asian Boom stylistics are few and far between.²⁹⁶ What I argue is that it is these judgments about the *way* in which South Asian authors successfully address the Euro-American center (stylistics) are deeply influenced by discomfort about the immediacy of the market (economics), rather than any aesthetic or representational strategy per se.

John Guillory suggests that while the conflict around the relationship between aesthetics and economic value reaches all the way back to philosophy of the Enlightenment, the critique of literary canon that occurred in academia in the United States during the

²⁹¹ Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, 121.

²⁹² Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 275, 61.

²⁹³ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, 25, 43.

²⁹⁴ Chakravorty, *In Stereotype*.

²⁹⁵ Alice Miles, “Shocked by Slumdog’s Poverty Porn,” *The Times*, London, January 14, 2009. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article5511650.ece.

²⁹⁶ For two good examples of this countervailing trend, see Bahri, *Native Intelligence* and Black, *Fiction Across Borders*.

eighties and nineties precipitated a more general crisis of faith about the independent “value” of literary aesthetics in general.²⁹⁷ I will argue, however, that in addition to this larger shift in the critical reception of literature, the very visibility of market operations around the South Asian Boom in particular, and the growing sense that its literary producers no longer worked in ignorance of market demands, contributed to this crisis of legitimacy in Creator theories. We can see how this works with reference to Brian Spooner’s exploration of a similar crisis in the context of Turkmen carpets.²⁹⁸ As these carpets have become more widely available in recent years, more and more emphasis has been placed on their “authenticity,” although what is meant by authenticity is neither clear nor consistent. One of its dimensions, however, seems to be the sense that producers of the carpets create their wares without reference to what sells on the Western market, even though that market is the main consumer of their product. The authenticity bind, which seems transparently unfair when applied to marginalized producers in a cottage industry like carpet weaving, has nevertheless totally overtaken scholarship about peripheral literature.²⁹⁹

Boom phenomena are deeply troubling to literary scholarship because the very idea of novels as commodities flies in the face of deeply held beliefs that literature *cannot* operate like other market goods. In his pathbreaking study of commodities, *The Social Life of Things*, Arjun Appadurai chooses to write about a “commodity situation” rather than commodities per se because this means “looking at the commodity potential of all things rather than searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sorts of things.”³⁰⁰ Literature is one of those objects that has historically resisted “commodity potential” due, Appadurai argues, to its status as an “aesthetically elaborated

²⁹⁷ Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 317, 321, 271.

²⁹⁸ Brian Spooner, “Weavers and Dealers: The Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 195–236.

²⁹⁹ As Sarah Brouillette, Saman Gupta, Pavithra Narayanan, Ruvani Ranasinha and others have rightly noted, the market for Anglophone South Asian literature is not, in fact, singular. Nor is it singularly focused in the West, although Euro-American markets are significantly responsible for its emergence as a “Boom” commodity, and as such, the assumed audience in much of the scholarship around that literature.

³⁰⁰ Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 13.

object.” As Pierre Bourdieu wrote in 1978, the valuation of literature is predicated on an inverse of market logic, in which authors have historically been esteemed to the degree that they seem to stand aloof from the economic success of their production.³⁰¹ Although Bourdieu’s analysis (and later Guillory’s) shows that this distinction has always been a spurious one, I believe that the particular force of peripheral literary Booms makes it especially clear that literature can no longer be exempted from the “commodity situation.” The increasing *obviousness* of market influence on Boom phenomena (including, perhaps, Boom stylistics) between the 1960s and the 1990s, therefore, plays a role in the negative turn in more recent scholarship.

As we shall see in the Contexts and Curators sections below, the market dynamics that created the South Asian Boom were already emerging during the 1960s Latin American boom. To an extent, however, the nature of circulation in the Latin American boom allowed for the appearance of this kind of distance from, even ignorance of the market. The limits on communication technology, intercultural exchange and international travel relative to the 1990s meant that information about the literary market was less available both to producers *and* consumers in the Latin American boom. In particular, the time delay between original Spanish publication and access to translations for Euro-American audiences, especially in the early years of the boom, might have contributed to a lack of suspicion about those authors’ ability to directly address the Anglophone center of the transnational market.³⁰² In contrast, the success of South Asian fiction in the 1990s publishing market was a spectacle happening in real time. Even the initial acquisition of publication rights and the size of advances were either observed as they happened, or became part of these novels’ lore as soon as they were published.³⁰³ Re-associating the market dynamics under which both Booms occurred therefore pushes back against the perception that South Asian boom authors were uniquely invested in economic success.

³⁰¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production, Or: The Economic World Reversed,” *Poetics* 12 (1983): 311–356.

³⁰² This is so much the case that certain scholars from outside Latin American Studies forget that Latin American literature of the 1960s had already “boomed” in an Ibero-American context long before becoming a crossover success in English and French translation. See for example, Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation*, 169–170, and Faiza Khan, “A Fictional Boom,” *The Open Magazine*, January 9, 2010. <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/voices/a-fictional-boom>.

³⁰³ Squires, *Marketing Literature*, 119–147.

In the next section, we will take a closer look at theories about the influence of “Context” on the emergence of both booms on the world literary market. As we shall see, many of these contexts were shared in both booms, or have merely intensified in the years between the Latin American case and its South Asian successor. In particular, however, I want to explore the differences that arise from the language of production in each boom, and how that difference has impacted the way scholars understand South Asian Anglophone authors as strategic, intentional, and cynical – that is, perverse – in their approach to the transnational literary market.

CONTEXTS

Spooner’s example of the Turkmen carpets seems to suggest that there are two kinds of audiences for “aesthetically elaborated” object from the global periphery. One is the “authentic” audience, which shares a broadly construed cultural context with the object’s producer; the other is the “inauthentic” audience, defined primarily by its location outside that cultural context.³⁰⁴ Context theories of literary booms generally concern expansion of the size of one or the other of these audiences, their level of connection to the rest of the world, and the changing power dynamics between them. Likewise, the primary feature that distinguishes South Asian Context theories is their almost exclusive focus on inauthentic audiences, and concomitantly, on the language through which those audiences are accessed.

Before addressing the thorny relationship between language, authenticity, and boom dynamics, let us first get a sense of the broad scholarly agreement about how each audience grew and changed over the fifty years between 1958 (the beginnings of the Latin American boom) and 2008 (for the purposes of this study, the “end” of the South Asian boom). Written less than a decade after the generally recognized end of the Latin American Boom, cultural critic Ángel Rama’s 1981 essay “El Boom en perspectiva” [The Boom in Perspective] offers a wide-ranging and surprisingly complete set of explanations for the

³⁰⁴ Rashmi Sadana sums up the “authentic/inauthentic” distinction within India in the following way: “In this case authenticity has to do with the social and economic privileges of the literary Indian English writer who is assumed to be pandering to a global rather than to a regional audience and who is considered to be ‘less Indian’ for doing so. [...] This kind of literary culpability is nearly always linked to [...] the perception that English represents a globalized, consumerist culture that hypes its products.” Rashmi Sadana, *English Heart, Hindi Heartland: The Political Life of Literature in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 138.

boom that touches on all three theory areas presented here.³⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Rama is most famous for his theorizations about Context factors that make up the heart of this section. Scholars of Contextual influence in the current boom coincide with Rama's analysis in identifying the large-scale demographic changes that increased readership for Boom authors within their home countries. Better educational attainment, growth in the middle class, etc., resulted in the expansion of "authentic" readerships – those who at least somewhat resemble the producers and subjects of Boom novels in terms of geographic origins and broadly shared culture – in Latin America during the 1960s. The same tendencies are broadly shared in South Asian demographic trends in the 1990s and 2000s. Rama uses numerous quotes from boom authors to suggest the latter did what they could to promote this explanation, since it seems to shore up the "authenticity" of their success while downplaying "inauthentic" aspects, especially the role of editorial promotion and publishing in (Anglophone) translation.

Yet there's no denying that the 1960s boom and its South Asian counterpart were also dependent on huge sales among "inauthentic," Anglophone publics in the economic "center" (the United States and Europe). Rama's focus on the growing commoditization and transnationalization of the publishing industry as a major driver of the Latin American Boom seems almost prescient in the light of recent "book history" studies of Anglophone South Asian texts offered in the work of Ruvani Ranasinha, Rashmi Sadana, Claire Squires, Pavithra Narayanan, and Robert Fraser. Indeed, although he does not use the term "globalization," Rama essentially makes the argument that the Boom came about in a moment of transition to that very model, a transition in which both authors and those that published them were becoming much more like any other industry under capitalism. As discussed above, Latin American authors of the 1960s derived an increasing amount of their economic support from activities directly related to literary writing; one either wrote professionally or not at all. At the same time, publishing became less like a hobby that driven by taste and relatively tolerant of risk, and more like a business that was driven by profit margins and accountable to stakeholders. While this initially led to an expansion of access to publishing and the production of new niches of popularity, ie "booms," the same

³⁰⁵ Rama, "El Boom en perspectiva."

features ultimately limited the number of authors and variety of work that could achieve success in the field.

Theorists of the second boom are in broad accord with Rama's timeline and its consequences for global publishing. Ranasinha and Narayanan offer histories of the publishing industry in Britain and India respectively that focus on the rise of Anglophone writing by authors of Indian origin in both areas. Narayanan emphasizes the growth of "authentic" audiences by showing how, contrary to popular understandings of the period, protections for indigenous publishing industries between 1970s to 1990 helped both Anglophone and vernacular South Asian writers flourish, albeit in a market more or less limited to India.³⁰⁶ This was not only because of reduced competition from other producers of Anglophone literature, but also because it put more Indians in "Curator" roles in the top tiers of Indian publishing. Progressive incursions of multinational publishing houses into India in the 1980s, and the wholesale removal of protections with liberalization in 1991, massively expanded the market for a few lucky authors, while marginalizing a greater number of their peers in India.

In the same time period, Ranasinha shows, interest in South Asian diaspora writing was growing in Britain, due both to the growth of immigrant populations and educational policies aimed at integrating them. The popularity of Anglophone South Asian fiction in the 1970s as part of the "Black is Beautiful" movements in Britain might therefore be considered an expansion of an "authentic" audience in the diaspora.³⁰⁷ At the same time, the breakaway success of writers like V. S. Naipaul in the 1970s (where Ranasinha dates the opening of a South Asian Boom-like phenomenon) inaugurated a change in perceptions of quality and possibility for global Anglophone fiction among broader British reading publics and the editors that catered to them. Ranasinha shows that whereas earlier generations of South Asian authors like Mulk Raj Anand were considered to have limited marketability in

³⁰⁶ Pavithra Narayanan, *What Are You Reading? The World Market and Indian Literary Production* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2012), 89-96.

³⁰⁷ Robert Fraser suggests that the same type of movement for Civil Rights in the United States during the 1960s helped create a spike in interest around Anglophone African writers among primarily "authentic" audiences in Africa and the African diaspora. He links this phenomenon directly with the post-Rushdie emergence of South Asian Anglophone literature, excluding the possible further conditioning of the market by the emergence of South Asian diaspora writers like Naipaul and Latin American writers. Fraser, *Book History Through Postcolonial Eyes*, 183; Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain*.

England as exotic curiosities, post-Naipaul South Asian writing became a legitimate “literary” force. Squires’ general history of the commoditization of British publishing likewise emphasizes the important transition from the early seventies to the early nineties, in which the old version of editorial control – where decisions were directed by the taste and preferences of a few editors acting in the role of Curators – was replaced by a more standard corporate model. Thus we see a broad agreement that commoditization was an ongoing process from the 1970s onwards, one for which the mid-sixties, when the Boom gained footing in the Anglophone world, could be a convincing transitional period.

Novels of both Booms portray the life-worlds of people who speak languages other than English. Yet in order to achieve the full level of explosive growth for which they are now famous, these novels have had to address English-speaking audiences in Europe and North America. While Latin American authors address these audiences primarily through translation, contemporary South Asian authors writing in English can access these markets much more directly. This difference has suggested to many scholars that South Asian authors are writing *for* the market – and, just as importantly, that authors in other language traditions *are not*. A more careful examination of the similarities and differences from the Latin American case indicate that this distinction is less significant than many South Asianist scholars imagine.

As it became clear in the 1990s that South Asian Anglophone literature was experiencing a boom driven primarily by “inauthentic” publics, anxieties quite rightly emerged over whose voices and whose stories were being circulated to those publics. In the previous section, we saw how Creator theorists credit (or blame?) “perverse” stylistics with driving South Asian Boom novels to global success. Certain branches of Context scholarship also buy into the idea that Boom novels employ “inauthentic” representations in order to address “inauthentic” audiences. However, they tend to connect that inauthentic form of representation very closely to language of composition.³⁰⁸ According to these critics –

³⁰⁸ The focus on language of production in Context theories of the South Asian Boom seems to be intimately related to more general concerns about the central role of English in the contemporary economic and political life of India. For this reason, both Sadana and Narayanan open their monographs with reflections on the paradox that India’s elites have used English to great economic and literary advantage, while the majority of Indians still have little-to-no facility in the language. These critiques are also echoed in more popular writing about Indian Anglophone literature. See for example, Aatish Taseer, “How English Ruined Indian Literature,” *The New York Times*, March 19,

including Sadana's informants in the Delhi publishing industry and scholars like Narayanan – Anglophone literary production in a postcolonial context is inevitably inauthentic compared to vernacular writing because the former seeks approval outside their proper cultural sphere while the latter addresses itself to a homegrown audience

Behind the association | Anglophone: inauthentic :: vernacular: authentic | are two important assumptions. The first is the (largely correct) assumption that an Anglophone public is culturally heterogeneous and the author who successfully addresses that public may have to make accommodations for those who are not as familiar with his or her culture of origin.³⁰⁹ The second (often incorrect) assumption is that the vernacular public is culturally homogenous and thus an authentic vernacular writer should have to make very little accommodation of cultural (or other) difference to communicate with them. Rashmi Sadana argues against this assumption, writing “ Like English, even if not to the same extent as English, the so-called regional languages are created across different cities and areas outside of the regional, or original location of language. What this means is that each so-called regional-language literature imbibes ways of looking at the world that transcend its geographic location.”³¹⁰ In another chapter, she demonstrates how, in making various accommodations for a “vegetarian audience” of middle-class North Indian Hindus (the assumed cultural audience for a Hindi novel), the Hindi translator of Seth's *A Suitable Boy* made significant changes to the content and style from the English original. She also emphasizes that the *diversity* of readers within the Hindi public sphere interpreted these changes in a number of conflicting ways.³¹¹ Nevertheless, the assumption that vernacular

2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/opinion/sunday/how-english-ruined-indian-literature.html>. While the ire of certain critics is directed at Anglophone literature, these are more properly critiques of the Indian state. Bill Ashcroft witheringly dismisses these critiques as casting South Asian Anglophone authors “as mere ciphers for global forces.” Bill Ashcroft, “Bridging the Silence: Inner Translation and the Metonymic Gap,” *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures: Multilingual Contexts, Translational Texts*, ed. Simona Bertacco. (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), 34.

³⁰⁹ To this list Fraser would add a third faulty assumption, that Anglophone publics do not also contain a significant percentage of South Asian diaspora readers whose desire for representations of the subcontinent may have entirely un-perverse origins. Fraser, *Book History Through Postcolonial Eyes*, 186.

³¹⁰ Sadana, *English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, 103.

³¹¹ *Ibid*, 138-151.

publics are culturally uniform and authentic vis-a-vis the publics for South Asian Anglophone literature remains vital.

We can see how this logic operates in a quote from a blog post about Pakistani Anglophone literature and the Latin American Boom written by Faiza Khan. For Khan, Latin American authors' recourse to Spanish is a marker of their authenticity vis-a-vis the market: "They engage with their local traditions; their writing, even when read in translation, is infused with the local idiom, it has its own distinct flavour..." In contrast, "it must surely be excruciatingly difficult" for Pakistani Anglophone authors "to write anything with real conviction when half of your efforts go into providing explications for a foreign readership."³¹²

Khan's argument here echoes much of what is implicit in more formal scholarship about the role of English in promoting the South Asian Boom. That is, she makes explicit the assumption that writing in a language other than English automatically addresses a culturally uniform, "authentic" audience. This is one example of why a comparative examination of the real conditions of the Latin American Boom is so necessary to balance certain critical tendencies in the South Asian case. Quite contrary to the assumptions of Khan and the larger vernacular : authentic association, even before it became an Anglophone phenomenon in translation, the Latin American Boom was the product of diversions of national print cultures into a transnational Hispanophone publishing sphere. Chilean Boom novelist José Donoso emphasizes the importance of this growth in transnational publishing in his *Historia personal del Boom* [*The Boom: A Personal History*]. He suggests that before the Boom, novels published in Chile would almost never reach neighboring Argentina, to say nothing of far-flung publics in places like Mexico.³¹³ As Donoso makes clear, a writer from Chile would have to expend considerable effort "providing explanations to a foreign readership" in Cuba, Colombia or Peru, let alone the major market for Boom literature in Spain. And this does not even take into account the significant extent to which Latin American writers of the later part of the Boom were writing with an eye to eventual translation for Anglophone publics, and the intimate relationships developed between "star authors" and their "star translators" during that

³¹² Khan, "A Fictional Boom."

³¹³ José Donoso, *Historia personal del "Boom"* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1983), 16

period.³¹⁴ In fact, issues of cultural representation over Latin America's diverse cultural spaces sparked fierce debates among Boom-era authors and cultural critics.³¹⁵

Ironically, considering this last point, it is a commonplace within South Asia Boom theories that translated literature cannot "Boom" in the transnational market.³¹⁶ On the one hand, current statistics bear her out: the market share for literature translated into English hovers between three and five percent. All literary scholars should be concerned with the effect of these shamefully low numbers. On the other hand, the Latin American case makes it clear that Boom conditions *can* and *did* originate outside of English. They did not emerge, however, without the possibility of significant expansion into the Anglophone market. By extension, Boom conditions probably cannot arise unless authors intentionally address some sort of "inauthentic" public, whether the Euro-American center or in another peripheral location.³¹⁷ Thus, if South Asian vernaculars *were* to Boom internationally, they might do so at the expense of their claim to authenticity. In fact this is precisely what Lawrence Venuti argues in *Scandals of Translation*, that any foothold which vernacular writers of the Third World might gain in in the Euro-American market through translation merely recapitulates the relations of colonialism.³¹⁸ The end result of this line of criticism is

³¹⁴ See, for example, two memoirs of Latin American Boom translators: Gregory Rabassa, *If This Be Treason* (New York: New Directions Book, 2005) and Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Subversive Scribe* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009).

³¹⁵ The most famous of these is arguably the polemic between José María Arguedas and Julio Cortázar from 1967-1969, which concerned the degree to which Latin American writing should address Europe or the United States. We might also consider Roberto Fernández Retamar's "Calibán: nuestro símbolo" (1971), which historicizes the same conflict with regard to nineteenth and twentieth century debates about cosmopolitanism versus indigenous expression as they were understood in the Shakespearean idiom of Ariel and Caliban.

³¹⁶ Narayanan vigorously argues that India has already produced a plethora of English translations of vernacular literature for circulation within India, and suggests that the failure of these translations to enter a global market demonstrates the hostility of the Anglophone publishers toward vernacular literature. One particular flaw in this argument is that it fails to consider the evidence of her own informants, some of whom suggest that it is the low quality of these existing translations that prevent them from reaching a wider audience. Narayanan, *What Are You Reading?*, 115-116.

³¹⁷ In what might be seen as an effort to square the circle within these debates, G.J. V. Prasad and Bill Ashcroft have both suggested that it might be productive to consider South Asian Anglophone literature itself a form of translation, since it involves representing primarily non-Anglophone life worlds in English. G. J. V. Prasad, "Writing Translation: The Strange Case of the Indian English Novel," in *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* ed. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London: Routledge, 1999); Ashcroft, "Bridging the Silence."

³¹⁸ "The translation practices enlisted by transnational corporations, whether publishers, manufacturers, or advertising agencies, function in the same fundamental ways as those that

that vernacular authors can only maintain their authenticity if they forgo the possibility of outside recognition altogether.

In a much larger sense, however, whether or not South Asian writers are acting “inauthentically” by creating a *supply* of Anglophone literature about India may be entirely beside the point. Creator theories suggest that supply of a certain style of literature *drives* demand. The greatest contribution of Context theories as a category is their ability to direct us toward a *demand-driven* understanding of boom phenomena. Earlier, we saw how Context theories, when read across booms, were able to give us a picture of the way that growth and change publishing industry and various reading publics had impacted demand last 50 years. Yet, in the Latin American case, Context theories have also suggested how geopolitics influenced the rise of boom literature in the 1960s. As Larsen and Cohn have both explored at length, Cold War concerns over the spread of Communism to Cuba was a major driver of international interest in Latin American cultural products. More specifically, both Cuba and the United States invested enormous amounts of money to support the production, circulation, and academic study of Latin American literature in the period. Moreover, the full impact of these initiatives has only become evident as more information about them has been declassified in the last few years.

All of this leads us to ask: why has so much energy been devoted to supply-driven theories of the South Asian Boom, and so little to demand? Why, more specifically, have both demand and supply been cast as perverse personal choices – the author eager to produce stereotypical materials, the reader eager to consume them – and not *political* choices? This, to my mind, is the biggest course correction that Latin American scholarship can offer to a united theory of boom phenomena. We will touch on where such inquiry might lead us at the end of in the next section. First, however, we will examine another increasingly important driver of Boom demand, the Curator.

underwrote European colonialism. The main difference is that translation now serves corporate capital instead of a nation state, a trading company, or an evangelical program.” Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation towards an Ethics of Difference*, 165.

CURATORS

Both Latin American and South Asian Boom scholars reserve space in their theories for “Curators,” hinge actors who are big enough to influence macro-level phenomena, but small enough to be influenced by other micro-level actors in their turn. Large-scale demographic changes or the evolution of a transnational publishing powerhouse lacks a single guiding force. Various writers and readers guide themselves, but are confined to a small sphere of influence. But a single editor, a few scholars, or a handful of jury members on the prize committee can, at the right moment, make a conscious decision that shapes world literary trends. Scholarly belief in the specific identities and relative power of these Curators changes between the two booms, partly due, of course, to differences between the two historical periods and cultural contexts in which they occurred. Yet historical difference alone does not account fully for these discrepancies. Instead, they are at least somewhat attributable to differences in ideology. Indeed, the Curator itself is somewhat of an ideological category, since identifying an actor that can both influence and be influenced essentially creates prescription for future action, and audience a to which a particular critic might address herself to if she wished to change the current trend.

In the Contexts section, we saw how changes in the publishing industry beginning in the 1960s have reduced the influence and relative freedom of editors as Curators, independent actors who can take risks and produce trends according to the dictates of their own taste. While, as Deborah Cohn shows in “Retracing the Lost Steps,” translator Harriet de Onís and later editor Herbert Weinstock at Knopf were able to champion pre-Boom Cuban author Alejo Carpentier during the 1950s, that power to publish work based on perceived literary value and in spite of likely financial loss has progressively waned.³¹⁹

Increasingly, the roles that editors, translators and agents used to hold as the primary arbiters of taste have been transferred to literary prizes. One of the areas in which theories of both booms overlap the most is in the role of literary prizes as Curators, whose relatively small juries exert an outsized influence on the market. James English traces the general rise of cultural prizes in *The Economy of Prestige*, in which he argues that prizes have become essential for their role in converting the cultural capital of aesthetic products

³¹⁹ Deborah N. Cohn, “Retracing the Lost Steps: The Cuban Revolution, The Cold War and Publishing Alejo Carpentier in the United States.” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, 1 (2003): 81–108.

like literature into other kinds of capital-- social, political, and, of course, economic. In an appendix, English shows that in the 50 year period containing both Booms, literary prizes have risen at many times the rate of new publications, growing at an almost geometrical rate each decade from 1980 to the present.³²⁰ While there is continuity between the role of prizes in the 1960s boom and its 1990s counterpart, therefore, the influence of prizes intensifies in parallel to (and doubtless in tandem with) the general rise of commoditization within the publishing industry.

For the Latin American Boom, the Curator of primary importance was the Biblioteca Breve prize awarded by Spanish publishing house Seix Barral. In *El Boom de la novela latinoamericana*, Emir Rodríguez Monegal traces awards to Latin American authors starting in 1962 against the rise of Boom literature in Latin America. Year after year, he shows, the prize committee at Seix Barral set the aesthetic terms of what was to become the Boom, first selecting the criteria on which Latin American literature would be judged, and then incentivizing the success of those novels deemed worthy by endorsing such work with a sales-boosting prize.³²¹ Whereas Martin and Casanova understood the recapitulation of Euro-American modernist aesthetics to precede and condition the recognition in Boom-era novels (a *supply-driven* analysis), Rodríguez Monegal argues that the Seix Barral prize actually imposed those unifying aesthetics by signaling what kind of work would be rewarded (a *demand-driven* analysis). It must be emphasized again here that the Seix Barral Prize and its impact helped to drive the transnational spread of Latin American Literature well before these novels emerged into an Anglophone literary scene. Rodríguez Monegal, Rama, Donoso and others who credit the Biblioteca Breve prize with a Curator role within the boom emphasize its role in promoting certain aesthetics over others. There are divergent interpretations of the political implications of that influence. At the same time, they seem to view Seix Barral's role in making Latin American publishing more transnational as an essentially positive contribution. This is notable in light of the largely negative judgement of the intentions and effects of the Curator award that performs a parallel role for the South Asian Boom, the Mann-Booker Prize.

³²⁰ James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridg.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 323-329.

³²¹ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *El boom de la novela latinoamericana* (Caracas: Editorial Tiempo Nuevo, 1972), 22-24.

Before the 1980s, the Booker had awarded or shortlisted two British authors for books *about* India, and awarded V.S. Naipaul, a descendent of the nineteenth century South Asian diaspora. Yet it was not until 1980 that a writer actually from India, Anita Desai, made it onto the shortlist. History was made the next year when she was joined by Salman Rushdie, and the two essentially alternated years as winners or on the shortlist throughout the rest of the 80s. In the 1990s, three more major South Asian writers were recognized by the Booker: Rohinton Mistry was shortlisted in 1991 for *Such a Long Journey* and again in 1995 for *A Fine Balance*, Michael Ondaatje won in 1992 for *The English Patient*, and Arundhati Roy won in 1997 for *God of Small Things*. Whereas, according to the Booker lists, the 20 years between 1980 and 2000 had produced five notable authors of South Asian descent, the prize has since nominated no less than ten South Asian authors (only two of whom had been nominated before 1999) and awarded two: Kiran Desai, daughter of Anita, for *The Inheritance of Loss* in 2006, and Aravind Adiga for *The White Tiger* in 2008.

Publishing in the last five years, Narayanan, Ranasinha, Brouillette and Sadana, discussed in sections one and two, all emphasize the now-obvious role of the Booker Prize in increasing popularity of a certain strain of Anglophone South Asian literature. These appraisals are preceded, however, by Graham Huggan's recognition of the same general trend in 2001. In *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Huggan asserts that the Booker is responsible for promoting a set of postcolonial novels that serve two conflicting functions at once. On the one hand, by supporting authors of the postcolonial periphery, the Booker company attempts to expiate its guilt as an economic beneficiary of "high colonialism" in the Caribbean. At the same time, the Booker promotes a set of hackneyed, stereotypical aesthetics about the postcolonial world that stoke its British readers' desire for the exotic – a clear invocation of the perversity discourse. In constructing this argument, Huggan creates a historiography that he intends to hold true for all postcolonial locations, even though it is based on primarily on evidence in some way related to South Asia. Moreover, Huggan asserts continuity between the wins for South Asian authors in the eighties and nineties and earlier awards for fiction by British writers *about* the Indian subcontinent under colonialism, an aesthetic he labels "Raj Revival."³²²

³²² Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 105-121.

The disadvantage of Huggan's temporal position, however, is that he could not predict the incredible rise of South Asian nominations between 1997 and 2008, which in hindsight seems to speak discrete, geographically-bounded phenomenon emerging from South Asia, rather than broadly Postcolonial boom Huggan describes. In this light, not only the historiography he constructs, but the aesthetic judgment he derives from it both fall into question. Even when they relinquish his genealogy, however, many more recent critics, including Brouillette and Narayanan, have recapitulated Huggan's conclusions about the "exoticist" aesthetics that the Booker promotes. Again, as we saw in the Creators section above, aesthetic choices here are reduced to a single dimension: their market value. According to this logic, Narayanan holds that the Booker's 1981 award to Rushdie created an unprecedented moment in which "developing countries and minorities had entered the consciousness of the West. The "Other" had been discovered."³²³ These critics give the Booker entirely too much credit. If any prize should be blamed for inaugurating the trend of "developing countries and minorities," it should be the Biblioteca Breve in 1962.

The way authors react to prizes also indicates their appraisal of that category as a Curator for the market. This is not merely in the way they may be understood to court awards by favoring certain aesthetics, but also in the way they comment on prizes they refuse or fail to win. Sadana, for instance examines the way Seth successfully converted cultural capital into political capital by refusing the Commonwealth Prize on the grounds that he disavowed the Commonwealth category. Roy achieved something similar in her refusal of the *Sahitya Akademi* prize awarded by the Indian government, citing disagreements with several of its policies. It was considered supremely unsavvy, on the other hand, when Rushdie publicly complained about *not* winning the Booker for *The Moor's Last Sigh* in 1995.³²⁴ This falls in line with a curious imbalance in cultural criticism noted by English. Awards can be vociferously critiqued and derided, even by those who accept and benefit from them, but no one should ever be understood to approve of or outwardly desire a prize. In a moment when prizes are so closely tied to economic success, these politics around prizes seem to recapitulate Bourdieu's inverse market logic, in which the desire for critical success (with its obvious commercial benefits) is anathema to "authentic" artistry.

³²³ Narayanan, *What Are You Reading?*, 95.

³²⁴ Sadana, *Rashmi, English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, 153-175.

Academic departments and individual scholars can also play a Curator role in literary Booms. They are both drivers and beneficiaries of the increased attention and prestige accorded to their subjects as part of Boom phenomena. When we see them primarily as beneficiaries, then we are firmly in the realm of Context theories. When we see them primarily as drivers, however, then certain actors within academia may be considered Curators. As noted in the previous section, book historians have suggested that the growing popularity of African and South Asian Anglophone fictions in the sixties and seventies was directly related to pedagogical imperatives, both in the Euro-American center and in various peripheries.

Yet attention to specific Curatorial actors within the academy has notably increased in theories of the South Asian boom. Certainly, in the years between the end of the first Boom and the opening of the second, a vastly larger percentage of the population of North America and Europe has entered higher education. Academic trends for those areas, then, should have a proportionally larger impact on general literary tastes. Similarly, debates about the literary canon (discussed in Creators) emerged around the same period as the South Asian Boom, and have certainly had an impact on the level of attention paid to academic Curators on that phenomenon. It is my contention, however, that in an effort to be reflexive about our own role in the commoditization of literature, scholars may be inadvertently overestimating our sphere of influence. Scholarship on the 1960s Boom enjoins us recall, even as we consider our impact on the literature on which we fix our gaze, the much more powerful Contextual factors that shape academic priorities above our heads and behind our backs.

Many scholars in this debate address specific, future-oriented recommendations toward the academy in order to try to either curtail the boom itself, or, more often, take advantage of the popularity of Anglophone South Asian fiction to popularize vernacular texts. Behind these recommendations the assumption that the academy is controlled by Curators, a group of powerful actors small enough to regard these individual pleas, but large enough impact both literary markets and their own institution.

But what if that assumption is wrong?

One thing that recent Boom scholarship suggests to us is that, whether or not academia acts as a Curator of literary trends, it does not do so as an independent agent.

Instead, academia is susceptible to influence from external Contextual forces. Deborah Cohn illustrates how this is so in *The Latin American Literary Boom and US Nationalism During the Cold War*. Her research on the Cornell Latin American Year, among other programs, demonstrates that academia did, at times, play a Curatorial role in the Boom: by raising the profiles of Latin American literature within American culture, by supporting individual authors through grants and visiting professorships, and by providing a venue in which those authors could enter into productive dialogue with one another and with their American counterparts. Yet Cohn's most important contribution is to trace the links of these and other Curatorial functionaries – cultural awarding bodies such as the PEN foundation, and literary foundations and journals – to Cold War diplomatic policies of the US government. Both Latin American authors and the US academia that supported them were underwritten, to a surprisingly large extent, by government programs and funding streams aimed at furthering US aims abroad. As we saw in chapter one, this is not to claim that participants and beneficiaries of these programs were necessarily unaware of their affiliations, or that they were unable to take advantage of these programs to further their own, often dissenting aims. What Cohn's research provokes us to ask, however, is what geopolitical interests, and even government programs promoting those interests, might be influencing current interest in South Asian Literature?

There are many of avenues in which this kind of institutional investigation could lead, but one has already been suggested by recent scholarship on the South Asian Boom. As discussed in Contexts, scholars of the South Asian Boom generally (and quite rightfully) lament the fact that little academic attention is paid to vernacular South Asian languages. Addressing the academy as a Curator, scholars like Ray, Lazarus and Naryanan enjoin the powers that be to produce more scholars in a position to promote vernacular literature. We can translate this as a call to support language learning and literature teaching for the next generation of US-trained graduate students, still the major source of academic professionals in the US higher education system.

Considering the energies this group of scholars devote to self-reflexivity, it is striking that none of them note the extraordinary harmony between their own position here and the one supported by streams of government funding that operate within academia. We need only recall, indeed, that Area Studies themselves – out of which both Booms gained

momentum within US academia – grew directly out of Cold War geopolitics. Nowadays, the study of South Asian vernaculars within the US academy is heavily imbricated with Foreign Language Area Studies, Language Flagships, and Critical Language Scholarships. These last two initiatives, in particular, were inaugurated 2002 and 2006 and focus on languages of strategic geopolitical interest – including South Asian vernaculars Bangla, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu—as those interests were defined in the wake of September 11th.

This timeline is roughly similar to the one for the South Asian Boom. Indeed, Hanif offers a wink at the connection between interest in South Asia and the September 11th attacks when he includes a brief encounter with Osama bin Laden in *Exploding Mangoes*, reminding his U.S. audience of their government's previous engagement in Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan conflict of the 1980s. While the majority of scholarship has been focused on authors of what I have labeled the pre-Boom (1981-1993) and early Boom (1993-1997), we have seen that growth in prizes, prestige and sales for South Asian Boom literature was much more significant *after* 1997, and particularly after the millennium. Of course this timeline exempts these programs from being, themselves, Boom drivers. Rather, the growth of government funding and popular literature in parallel alerts us to the possible existence of a larger geopolitical interest that exerts pressure on both.

What drives the larger Western interest in South Asia, of which Boom literature is, most probably, only a symptom? Whether it is economic – growth in the Indian economy, Bangladeshi textile production – or political – Pakistan's involvement in the US war in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan's nuclear capabilities – it is unlikely merely to be “touristic.” And that, at last, is the heart of the issue over the progressive deformation of the aesthetics argument that has occurred between the Latin American Boom and today. Our exploration of Creator and Context theories has suggested that, when scholars could no longer deny the commodification of South Asian literature, they began to deny that such literature was anything *but* a commodity. Within that argument, aesthetics operate *only* as a marketing device that satisfies the perverse desires of writers and readers, a claim that does a great disservice to literature's other dimensions as a cultural object, as well as writers' and readers' other dimensions as ethical actors.

Now, we have seen how the same reductionist view also harms our understanding of literature as a political object. In critiquing the supposed perversity of the South Asian

Boom reader, Huggan and Brouillette label her a “tourist.” Yet a tourist, fundamentally, is nothing but a sub-genre of consumer with some uncomfortable colonialist baggage. As we have seen, the global circulation of literature in “Booms” depends on many dimensions, not just consumerism. Moreover, of all the foreign presences of which we might be wary, the tourist-consumer is by far the least threatening. The risk of reducing Boom aesthetics to “exotica” whose main purpose is to titillate consumers is not simply, as Deepika Bahri argues, that we could miss out on the redemptive political projects *within* South Asian Anglophone novels.³²⁵ It is much more acutely that we could ignore both positive and negative political projects *behind* their emergence on the world stage.

CONCLUSION

As part of her methodology for investigating the British publishing industry, Squires defends the practice of writing a historiography of the present, as history itself unfolds.³²⁶ Of course, this is precisely what is undertaken with the South Asia Boom in the current chapter. Constructing a more nuanced historiography of marginal Booms has a particular urgency. As we have seen, even when they purportedly focus on intra-literary qualities, analyses of Boom novels are almost always informed by judgements about the extra-literary factors that drive Booms themselves. If a scholar understands the driver of circulation to be crass, politically reprehensible, or otherwise unsavory, she will generally find the literature to be the same. To understand these Booms as multi-factorial, then, is to reduce this burden of judgment on any one actor or system. This may be a very healthy development, indeed.

But the lack of historical distance can derail efforts to accurately identify a trend and its drivers. This is one of the advantages of taking recourse to the Latin American Boom as a historical precursor: the many decades of research in various styles can suggest critical avenues that do not seem as obvious now, but may prove more fruitful in the fullness of time. Reference to the 1960s Boom also offers a corrective to the tendency among South Asianist and postcolonial critics to assert that the phenomenon they describe is absolutely unique and unprecedented. Things have changed from the 1960s Boom era. Yet they have generally changed on a continuum, rather than in radically unpredictable ways. What we

³²⁵ Bahri, *Native Intelligence*.

³²⁶ Squires, *Marketing Literature*, 12.

see as pervasive traits in the publishing industry of today were already emerging to drive the Latin American Boom. Academia may have gained more sway over canonicity and Boom promotion – as, among other things, many more people are receiving college educations– but this, again, is a change in degree and not in kind. Moreover, although the Cold War has long ended, the relationship between cultural arbiters and governments has not. This is *especially* true of academia, whose attentions are often deeply and directly affected by government funding priorities.

All of this seems increasingly urgent in a moment when we find ourselves on the cusp of what may be yet another peripheral Boom, this time of literature from Africa. Of course, writers from Africa have been publishing in English for many decades, and have experienced smaller bursts of popularity in the sixties (with writers such as Achebe) and eighties (with writers such as Coetzee), as Huggan Robert Fraser, and others have described. Yet, the critical and popular attention garnered by African Anglophone novels in the last several years seems to be as much related to the boom genealogy of their South Asian and Latin American predecessors as it does to these previous Africa-specific trends. Indeed, a recent article in *The New York Times* makes clear that contemporary Anglophone African fiction seems to be emerging into a transnational market that has already been conditioned by the existing popularity of South Asian literature. “More than a decade ago, when the young Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was struggling to get her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* published, an agent told her that things would be easier “if only you were Indian” because Indian writers were in vogue.”³²⁷ Because the publishers in each case are mostly the same, here we can see an explicit reference to the passing of the torch from South Asian writing to a new area. Even certain Boom drivers, like the Booker Prize, remain consistent from the South Asian case to the African one.

It’s too early to know (and outside my area of expertise to hazard) whether contemporary African Anglophone literature will constitute another “boom”. Yet because this literature emerges in another Anglophone location, it is situated, from a disciplinary standpoint so as to be studied by an overlapping group of scholars and critics, one may hope

³²⁷ Felicia Lee, “New Wave of African Writers with an Internationalist Bent,” *The New York Times*, June 29, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/30/arts/new-wave-of-african-writers-with-an-internationalist-bent.html>.

that the study of what drives this Boom may be more generous to the authors and readers who participate in it. Yet, if anything, scholars and critics of the emerging African Boom have taken the opposite lesson, even more eager to pathologize Western tastes and the writers who appeal to them.³²⁸ This is not to say that there are not dire problems with distribution and support faced by many peripheral authors. Nor is it to accuse certain critics of behaving cynically. To the contrary, it is my belief that what most readers, writers, and scholars associated with peripheral literary Booms want is to see a wider and (according to their own categories) fairer distribution of Boom largesse within the region that Boom purports to represent. I want to conclude by cautioning, however, that the features that have received the most attention within Booms – aesthetic choices and the readers and writers who connect through them – are almost never the most relevant to diagnosing the ills of Boom dynamics. If we truly share the goals of more beneficiaries and broader representation, we will have to turn our critical attentions elsewhere.

What the poets dreamed of, the novelists have wrought. Over the course of this dissertation, we have traced the fate of that fantasy of literary encounters in the global south as it moved from imagined to real, from vernacular to Anglophone. In recovering the last hundred years of literary movements between Latin America and South Asia, we have witnessed the emergence of a literary sphere that is more connected than ever before, where literatures from these two regions can encounter one another on equal footing, though not on neutral ground. The fantasy of “speaking in tongues” has been replaced by the reality of speaking in English. It is one of the many ways in which the achievement of the poets’ dream is less rich, less open, and less diverse than the lived experience that preceded it. The connections between these two regions, connections that were once personal and “engaged,” have now increasingly settled into dominant patterns of exchange.

I am inspired by the unexpectedness, the contingency of those earlier encounters, and the way that the authors in this study made them more significant by “engaging with” the experiences related here, rather than merely living through them. It is this openness to one another, the desire for an intimate link, that encourages me to give a generous reading

³²⁸ Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, “African Books for Western Eyes,” *The New York Times*, November 28, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/30/opinion/sunday/african-books-for-western-eyes.html>.

to the misunderstandings that arose in those moments of encounter, to recognize, as the authors themselves did, the productive potential of mistakes.

Connection is not enough. In recovering the untold history of Latin American / South Asian literary encounters, I have been struck instead by the recurrence of the idea of kinship. The authors in this study invented their own family histories, their own national histories, and their own literary histories, purported to acquire each-other's languages in a matter of moments in order to create, not merely a sense of momentary linkage, but of deep artistic relation. In this final chapter, I have shown how a recourse to the language of genealogy can also help us recover the connections between whole corpuses of texts and clarify the conditions of their emergence as "global" phenomena. It is my hope that exploring the diverse branchings of these imagined family trees – or perhaps, more appropriately, family rhizomes? – that this project may not merely suggest a new set of related texts, but also a different *way of looking at relations*. As Octavio Paz put it to Tomás Segovia, this is the act of recognizing a "family resemblance," of imagining Latin America and South Asia as "twins, each in a different landscape and dressed in a different manner."³²⁹

³²⁹ Octavio Paz writing to Tomás Segovia about the similarities between India and Mexico. "Parantescos" and "unos gemelos, cada uno en un paisaje distinto y vestido de manera diferente." Paz, *Cartas a Tomás Segovia (1957-1985)* (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008), 114.

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