

**Words and Worlds:  
Transculturalism, Translation, Identity**

**A NORDFORSK Symposium Arranged by the Nordic Network of  
Literary Transculturation Studies**

**Helsinki, Finland 26-28.8.2011**

**Book of Extended Abstracts**

**Edited by Jopi Nyman**

**University of Eastern Finland  
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## PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

### Friday 26 August

- 9.30            Opening  
10.00           Morning coffee  
10.30           Keynote Lecture: Professor Harish Trivedi (University of Delhi): *Translation and the Postcolonial: Gandhi, Fanon and Rushdie*
- 12-13           Lunch
- 13-15           Working Groups A and B (PARALLEL SESSIONS)  
15-15.30       Afternoon coffee  
15.30-17       Work Groups C and D (PARALLEL SESSIONS)
- Steering Board Meeting
- 19.00           Dinner (own arrangements)

### Saturday 27 August

- 9.30            Morning Coffee  
10.00-12.00   Working Groups E and F (PARALLEL SESSIONS)  
12-13           Lunch  
13-14           Keynote lecture: Professor Stephen Wolfe (University of Tromsø): *Here, There and Everywhere: Border Theory and Aesthetic Work*  
14-14.30       Afternoon coffee  
14.30-16.30   Working groups G and H (PARALLEL SESSIONS)
- 19.00           Conference Dinner. Restaurant Zetor, Helsinki.

### Sunday 28 August

- 10.00           Morning Coffee  
10.30-12       Working Groups' Reports and Final Plenary Session
- 12.00           Close of conference

## Working groups

### A:

- Eva Rein: Levels of Translation in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*
- Rūta Šlapkauskaitė: Displace, Converge, Translate: Maps and Photos in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*
- Jopi Nyman: Ijc Anonkoh efac fyfno ikrfb: Language, Translation, and Identity in Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses*
- Elita Salina: Voicing the Experience of Contemporary Emigration in Latvian Novel

### B:

- Joel Kuortti: India in Trans-late-it: Tendencies of Representation in Translating Indian Fiction
- Tatjana Biejutko: "Now tell me whether one can draw any parallels here,/Or worse, concentric circles": Bilingual Poetry Collections in Latvia
- Maija Burima: Oriental Attributes in Early Modernist Latvian Literature
- Ene-Reet Soovik: Translating Hybridity: Salman Rushdie's Novels in Estonian

### C:

- Jakob Lothe: Transculturation and Perspective in Modernism and Postcolonialism: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Aïssia Djébars's *So Vast the Prison*
- Johan Höglund: Skirting Hybridity: Translating Racial Anarchy in Richard Marsh's *The Surprising Husband*
- Benedikts Kalnačs: Transculturalism and National Identity: The Latvian Case
- Sandra Meškova: Joycean Echoes in Latgalian Literature

### D:

- Milda Danyte: Language Purity and Language Imperialism: Why East European Language Cultures of Lesser Use Distrust Translation Practices That Move in the Direction of Transculturation, Hybridity and Globalization
- Jena Habegger-Conti: Translating English into English: An Exploration into Academic Publishing and Cultural Standards
- Margareta Petersson: Distance and Intimacy on a Transcultural Stage: Letters from India.

### E:

- Pekka Kilpeläinen: Transcultural Encounters in Utopian Spaces: James Baldwin, Paris, and Heterotopia
- Amrita Kaur: Relating the Concept of *Transculturation* to Maxine Hong Kingston's Novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*
- Matthias Stephan: On Transcultural Sites in Science Fiction

F:

- Eva Birzniece: Identity and Language in the Latvian Literature of Deportation and Exile
- Ulla Rahbek: When Z Lost Her Reference: Language, Culture and Identity in Xiaolu Guo's *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*
- Kristina Aurylaite: "we got the right to take over the city with our very own rez lingo": Language Games and Troubles in First Nations Canadian Poems and Play
- Anne Holden Ronning: Translated Identities in Settler Literature

G:

- Lotta Strandberg: Generic Hybridity in Githa Hariharan's First Three Novels: Embedded Storytelling as a Strategy
- Kamal Sbiri: Writing Memory: Translating Identities in Transcultural (con)Text in Anouar Majid's *Si Yussef*
- Maria Beville: 'It beggars description': Uncanny History in Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea*
- Lene Johannessen: The Limits of Transculturation in John Sayles' *Lone Star*

H:

- Daniel Olsen: The Discomfortable Read: Literary Otherness and Transculturation in J. M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*
- Maria Olaussen: Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanism: Language and Transculturation in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*
- John A. Stotesbury: On Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley*
- Ashleigh Harris: Robert Mugabe's *Inside the Third Chimurenga* and Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys*: A Counterpoint

Kristina Aurylaite  
Vytautas Magnus University

### **“we got the right to take over the city with our very own rez lingo”: Language Games and Troubles in First Nations Canadian Texts**

“[W]e got the right to take over the city / spray paint it / with our very own rez lingo,” says the speaker in “Street Rite,” a poem by First Nations Canadian poet and Vancouver resident Gregory Scofield (116). The pun in the title suggests both ceremony and licence through which the poem’s “we” declare their insubordinate presence in a contemporary multicultural North American city. The poem further details a range of critical issues important to this particular urban setting: the ethnic segmentation of the city space, the aggression of a specific ethnic group, First Nations people, and their disturbing presence. This disturbance is manifested in such familiar subculture techniques as provocative graffiti, public drinking and faulting passers-by. The poem insists:

We got the right to speak/  
slurred unrefined English  
if we want to/  
yell in a back alley  
or talk tough to a pawn broker [...]   
if we want  
take out around the clock  
that’s up to us /  
when I want sushi  
that means now not later. (116)

But, in Scofield’s poem, this defiant behaviour transcends juvenile rebellion as the text counters a set of linguistic labels that have categorised, stereotyped and colonised Canada’s indigenous people as primitive, unrefined and not even human drunks and junkies. However, the impulse in Scofield’s poem is not to undo, deny or subvert these labels, but to pose the confrontational question, “so what?” The poem celebrates these people’s difference, their deviance from the norms of the dominant white society. It applauds their rejection of the advantages of assimilation and integration into the politically propagated dominant white culture. Furthermore, the poem aims almost ceremoniously to secure a space for the First Nations among Vancouver’s numerous ethnic neighbourhoods and, more generally, within Canada’s multicultural mosaic. For a long time the indigenous people were the “the invisible minority” (McMillan 327) in this mosaic, silent by implication.

Language plays a significant role in the First Nations’ “street rites.” English, imposed upon the colonised indigenous people in order to deracinate their culture, is now used by the poem’s “we” to announce their exuberant presence. Simultaneously, they twist, distort and fuse English with words from the indigenous languages. “Slurred,” “unrefined” and potentially subversive, the aberrant English

becomes an ethnic marker which is profusely used in contemporary texts by various ethnic minority writers, both indigenous and immigrant. The earlier generations of First Nations writers intended to make the stories of their debasement as comprehensible as possible in order to reach wider audiences; consequently, their autobiographical and testimonial texts were often accused of being simplistic. Now, minority writers eagerly engage in various language “games” and “troubles” (Castillo 145, 157).

The present paper explores some of the linguistic strategies that multilingual First Nations Canadian writers use in their texts. My aim is to illuminate the ways they, as Shackleton puts it, “appropriate the language of the imperial centre and use it for [their] own expressive purposes,” making it “essentially resistant” in their defiance of the values and practices of the dominant culture (215). As emphasised by Gilbert and Tompkins, the choice of a language or languages in this context is always a political act that determines not only the linguistic form of a text but also its implied audience (168). I also aim to show how the various language games in such texts govern and, quite frequently, manipulate their audiences by controlling their access to a text as well as the culture behind it. Thus these texts can resist the homogenising powers of the mainstream culture and, as Scofield’s poems, seek to (re)claim a space for the First Nations people in today’s world. They aim “to take over the city” as Scofield announces, mock-echoing the colonial project of appropriation, and it is through language that this space is (re)claimed: Scofield’s “spray painting” the city with “our very own rez lingo.” The word “lingo” means a group language and in the poem becomes an ethnic marker, “essentially resistant,” as Shackleton puts it (215), connoting difference and a specific group identity. Moreover, this lingo, made of “slurred unrefined” English that is fused with First Nations words, celebrates its speakers’ appropriation and exploitation of the colonial language. This allows not only for “upsetting” what is accepted as normative “proper” English, but also for crossing an imposed border — both spatial and linguistic — of the First Nations space, for which the infamous skid row serves as a metaphor.

Deleuze and Guattari propose that a mother tongue is “a power takeover by a dominant language, within a political multiplicity” and that language “stabilises” around a political/ideological centre (7). They evoke a spatial image of language that covers and controls a territory. In this context, multi-language awareness and linguistic competence parallel cultural and spatial border-crossing. In contrast, the use of a language unknown to the target audience may serve as an alienating strategy, exposing alliances or denying participation. This can be directed at a reader and/or a character. Moreover, in a multicultural country like Canada, multilingual practices may, as observed by Castillo, help users resist the homogenising strategies of dominant monolingualism, refuse “monocultural presumptions” and “interrogat[e] the unquestioned assumptions about Anglo-American social and linguistic practice” (150).

Canada has a history of language issues complicated by Anglo-French tensions and increasing waves of multi-ethnic immigrants. The official languages are constantly being “challenged” by a number of unofficial ones used by bilingual citizens, and opinions regarding the latter are inevitably quite varied. Scholars have distinguished between “subtractive” and “additive” forms of bilingualism. In the United States, for instance, there has been a “stigmatisation” of Spanish as a language of the poor, and Castillo explains that while learning Spanish has additive value for educated people who are fluent in English, the same language detracts from the social status of bilingual Latinos if it impedes their acquiring English language skills. This is because deficient fluency in the dominant

language is often interpreted as “general ignorance” (154). While the norm is the official language, other languages are categorised and “evaluated” depending on historical circumstances as well as on the status that a specific ethnic minority has within a country. The indigenous inhabitants of white settler countries such as Canada occupy a distinctive position. Unlike immigrant communities, this particular minority could not safely be relocated to a remote culture of origin and was therefore sought to be either made invisible by isolating them in reserves or else assimilated and acculturated into the norms of the dominant society. Thus the primary goal of the obligatory residential schools for First Nations children until the 1960s was to make them forget their native languages, which were regarded as obstacles to their successful assimilation into white society. Being prohibited to speak their native languages at these schools exacerbated the First Nations children’s alienation from their cultural practices and competence.

Having to learn and use the coloniser’s language signals the absence of power. The process also inevitably entails an imposition of a different language logic as well as a different world view. As First Nations playwright Tomson Highway has observed, one of the major difficulties for First Nations speakers in learning English is to grasp the concept of gender, which has no place in North American Aboriginal languages (*Mythologies* 24) Writers and critics have suggested that imposing English in the colonial context has resulted in inter-linguistic and inter-cultural translation. Quayson describes it as “cultural comparison and a concomitant form of self-evaluation” (xiii). Mojica and Knowles assert that, in relation to theatre,

One of the tasks of First Nations artists [...] is translation, broadly understood: translation between cultures and worldviews; translation between the unseen and the material worlds; translation between interior and exterior realities; translation between languages and discourses, including the values and ideologies they embody; and translation of the ways in which First Nations peoples navigate identity. Because most Native peoples in the contemporary world live in translation. (v-vi)

Using a learned language for a bilingual person entails translating — both ways — between languages and cultures, and/or crossing back and forth into linguistic and cultural spaces, tracking affinities and encountering blank spots of untranslatability.

This is precisely when Scofield’s “rez lingo” comes into play. It is a construct which does not comply with the norms of either English or a native tongue, but rather eases expression of the experience of living in translation. Castillo refers to this phenomenon as language “trouble” that multilingual writers have, cause, and relish:

Unsatisfied with a single tongue, they trouble language through elegant, aggressive, delicate, humorous deployment of code switching. They have double trouble with language’s excesses and insufficiencies, and suffer, enjoy, question, deplore the possibilities of doubleness in identity or voice. (157)

Similarly, contemporary First Nations writers frequently engage in language games, explore the possibilities of code switching, and project their language trouble onto their audiences. They celebrate the untranslatable in their cultures without trying to ease their reader's way into their texts. Frequently relying on oral tradition, still central to their cultures, they seem to treat their texts as performances, or "rites," as Scofield would have it. Their troubled language disturbs and alienates, it denies the monolingual audiences full access and participation. These writers relish tensions that such language games create and through various linguistic strategies they attempt to undermine the colonial assumptions that the First Nations cultures are primitive, simplistic, and transparent.

The poem "Piss and Groan" is an aggressive attack on white society's social politics. In it Scofield momentarily switches to his native Cree:

I got so much lower-class  
I far surpass  
their usual upper-class groan  
How they got to pay taxes  
and we don't  
as if we said 500 years ago  
put that in the treaty  
while you're at it  
roll out that whiskey keg  
and don't forget to include  
an educational clause  
if we're going to be force-fed  
your glamorous take-over history  
why not get paid to act  
the conquered part the part where we say  
hey, *môniyâs* I want my cheque  
gimme my cheque right now  
you owe me  
for this left-over land  
we never sold, gave up, handed over. (119-20)

The stanza on the moment of colonisation and seeks to find ways — in language — to exploit the situation foisted upon the indigenous people. The poem's sarcasm is direct and explicit, but the language here is troubled by the use of a single Cree word, *môniyâs*." The translation given in a footnote is, "non-Native person." Although this serves to manifest the demarcation line between "us" and "them," the translation reveals nothing about the implications of this word. Is its use derogatory, ironic, or maybe humorous? Therefore, while otherwise making the message in the poem all too clear, the poem's "I" utters this particular Cree word as a means of reversing the labelling/ categorising process. While most white readers are unsure of what exactly is meant by "*môniyâs*," which is evidently directed at them, it



is effectively coloured by the poem's explicitly militant message and cannot be read as merely some linguistic "spice"; instead, it is as if the poem's speaker finds English inadequate to address white establishment. In this case, the alien word becomes a carrier of an "immediate [cultural] context" (Castillo 154) only accessible to the insiders. This creates tension and a degree of insecurity amongst the members of the uninitiated audience — here, the poem's direct addressee. Monolingual readers are denied full participation since they cannot cross the linguistic, cultural and, implicit, spatial border.

Thomas King's writing provides a more extreme example of the tension that code-switching can induce. In the frequently anthologised short story "One Good Story, That One" (1993), an old storyteller is relating a First Nations version of Genesis to three white anthropologists. In his story, the first man with the suggestive name Ah-damn is making a list of the animals that God has created. But he is duped by trickster Coyote, who introduces herself in several different names:

Owl come by, says Ba-tee-po-tah.

Weasel come by, says So-tha-nee-so.

Rabbit come by, says Klaaa-coo.

Flint come by, says So-see-ka.

Fish come by, says Laa-po.

Crayfish come by, says Tling.

Beaver come by, says Khan-yah-da.

Boy, all worn out. All those animals come by. Coyote come by maybe four, maybe eight times. Gets dressed up, fool around.

Says Piisto-pa.

Says Ho-ta-ho.

Says Woho-I-kee.

Says Caw-ho-ha.

Ha, ha, ha, ha.

Tricky one, that coyote. Walks in circles. Sneaky. (8)

The Coyote figure demonstrates what Phelan calls "the failure of the proper name to render an identity" (13), which reverses, with a twist, the colonial project of naming. Yet the passage's code-switching is even more troubling. Though the initial impression is that the relationship between the two languages is transparent and innocent, the absence of a glossary in the text complicates it. The audience — the three anthropologists and the reader — is left to puzzle Coyote's four non-clarified "names" or guises. Also, the storyteller constantly confounds his listeners' expectations as to what kind of story and how to tell it, which leads them to distrust his diligence in translating between English and Ojibway. Finally, the white anthropologists, who are apparently confused, leave, while the storyteller's Ojibway friend Napaio openly enjoys the story. In this way, the indigenous language again signals that the uninitiated reader misses a message. This can be either evidence that the storyteller is carefully searching for commonalities between two different cultures or an entire subtext which possibly further troubles the already twisted story of Genesis.

Language can be deliberately employed as an ethnic marker and thereby effectively counter colonial visibility politics. The colonised Other was once put into the role of a passive and silent spectacle, an empty signifier that the coloniser filled with chosen meanings. Now, ethnic minorities no longer wish to assimilate and disappear. They would rather stand and sound out, preserving the differences that distinguish them, including their language. Current use of multiple languages in ethnic minority writing transcends what was simply mapping “a binary cartography” of “us” and “you.” The aim is now to “make the audience members or the readers experience how it feels to be partially excluded, to be minorities in their own city, foreigners in their own country” (Pena and Mendieta in Castillo 151).

Scofield’s “Street Rite” evokes a group that loudly demands to be acknowledged and given a space. As Deleuze and Guattari declare, the “territory is first of all the critical distance between two beings of the same species: Mark your distance. What is mine is first of all my distance; I possess only distances. Don’t anybody touch me, I growl if anyone enters my territory” (319-20). Here, bodily sounds and expressions become effective territorial markers. The “we” in Scofield’s poem “growl,” that is, speak their “rez lingo” and yell at an unwilling audience in order to prevent the latter from threatening their territory. They are squeezed right into the city centre, as in Vancouver, where the skid row is surrounded by two touristy spots, the “old town” of Gastown and Chinatown. Moreover, threatening to “take over the city,” this territory refuses to neatly adjust to the city’s multicultural mosaic. Rather, it turns the city space into a Foucauldian heterotopia, that is, an agitated state of space where logic and order fail to grasp its multiplicities:

in such a state, things are “laid,” “placed,” “arranged” in sites very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place or residence for them, to define a common locus beneath them all. [...] Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they destroy “syntax” in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things [...] to “hold together.” (Foucault xix)

In Scofield’s poem the indigenous space disturbs the city space, refuses to obey the governing order that seeks to hold together the ethnic mosaic and attentively guards its own borders from intrusion. The “rez lingo” denies the uninitiated access, whereas their own “slurred” English allows them to border-cross with relevant ease. Consequently, such linguistic strategies foreground the performative and empowering status of language and body. It is the rez lingo that is granted the power in the poem to almost ceremonially, as the poem’s title “Street Rite” suggests, clear a space for First Nations people within a city and to rearrange the imposed boundaries.

Language trouble strategies are especially effective in a theatrical performance. Printed texts “spiced up” with portions in foreign language are frequently equipped with glossaries, even if they are not always helpful, especially in regard to cultural terms. Audiences at live performances do not receive this assistance. For instance, Highway’s early play *Aria* (1984), a monodrama of seventeen women characters all played by one actor, has an entire passage in Cree. The play consists of brief segments in

which each of the characters tells her own story. While some of these contain a few phrases in Cree, they are not numerous and are translated. However, the part spoken by “The Indian Woman” is almost completely in Cree:

**The Indian Woman**

*Oo-oo n'si see-tuk*  
*Hey, ta-p'wee sa mi-thoo ki-noh-s'koo-si-wuk*  
*Oom-see-si ka-ga-noh-pi-ma-g'wow ma-na see-tuuk*  
*Hey, tas-kootch ma-na oo-tee pee-cha-eek*  
*Ee-moo-see-thi-muk a-wi-nuk*  
*U-wi-nuk ee-nee-pa-wit*  
*U-wi-nuk ee-pa-gi-ta-ta-moot*  
*U-wi-nuk ee-p'mat-sit*  
*Oo-oo n'si see-tuk*  
*Hey, ta-p'wee sa mi-thoo us-ki-tu-goo-si-wuk*  
*I-thi-gook ma-na een-tay-thee-ta-man*  
*Ta-na-ta-g'wow; ta-na-ta-g'wow*  
*I-goo-see-si nee-s'ta tay—si-pa-gi-ta-ta-moo-yan*  
*Tay-si-moo-see-ta-an pee-cha-eek*  
*Oo-oo n'si see-tuk these trees... (88)*

The passage is translated in a footnote which is preceded by the instruction, “[t]ranslation for production personnel only, not for audiences” (88). Interestingly, the next character to speak, “The White Woman,” responds to the preceding Cree words, offering some clarification to the audience:

The spirits.  
I see no spirits whatsoever  
On this cement, I don't know  
What this other woman is talking about.  
I walk on this cement, and the two  
This cement and I –  
Are distinctly separate and apart. (89)

In this way, Highway emphasises the idea of the failure of mutual understanding between these two incompatible world views. At the same time, the monodrama genre, which accommodates these conflicting voices within a single human figure/body, problematises the comfortable security that binaries and borders entail. A single body on stage and its pronounced series of brief successive spoken passages complicates the establishment of easy demarcation lines between white and First Nations worlds. Eventually, it is difficult to say who is who. That is, until the last passage spoken by “The Earth”

which fuses all, incorporating a line from each story, thus incorporating all the characters until the play closes — with a Cree word for Earth.

Contemporary First Nations writers use numerous and various linguistic strategies. Their language trouble disturbs, alienates and manipulates audiences not versed in all the languages employed. Most importantly, the performativity of such language games empowers the users and helps redefine colonially imposed linguistic, cultural and spatial boundaries. The possibility of negotiating with the white world is left open. However, the terms are redefined as the officially celebrated Canadian multicultural mosaic is turned in these texts into a troubled heterotopic space with no governing monosyntax that could grasp and control the multiple elements.

### Works Cited

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### **‘It beggars description’: Uncanny History in Joseph O Connor’s *Star of the Sea***

Joseph O Connor’s *Star of the Sea* is an Irish novel from 2002 in which the Gothic functions to unite the concerns of the text with history and identity as transitional experiences that linger somewhere on the margin between the strange and the familiar, basically associating transcultural issues with the idea of the uncanny. The novel, which demonstrates a definitively Gothic aesthetic, presents a pseudo-historical narrative of the events surrounding the twenty six day Atlantic passage of an immigrant ship, *Star of the Sea*, during the period of the Great Famine. The transitionary passage (reading the ship’s journey through the lense of Bhabha’s theory of the third space) for the immigrants on board the ship is haunted by individual memories and the repercussions of past events. On an outer level, the collective narrative, which is epistolary in form, dramatises the complicated and intertwined histories of England, Ireland and the United States as a relationship defined by unavoidable circumstance, colonial exploitation and personal struggle and trauma. This operates quite overtly while the central metaphor of the novel, the passage of fictional ship, demonstrates the idea symbolically so that the narrative itself can be seen as a transitionary passage and as an ‘other space’ where uncanny experiences and *ghostly* histories can intertwine and rewrite each other.

I will preface this presentation with two quotes, one from Nicholas Royle and another from Paul Riceour: ‘*Uncanniness entails a sense of uncertainty and suspense. How ever momentary and unstable. As such it is often to be associated with the experience of the threshold, liminality, margins, borders, frontiers*’ (Royle) and *Memory is ‘the presence of the absent encountered previously’* (Riceour). Royle’s approach highlights the relevance of reading the immigrant passage as a definitively uncanny experience. This in its own right is an important theme in O’Connor’s novel and I will go on to discuss this in more detail. But further to this I want to suggest, following the ideas of Riceour, that history itself is uncanny and that there is a recognition of this in the novel’s perspective on historiography.

It is arguable that the production of an inexact double is the result of all signification, particularly in the case of history-writing where the past is recognised as dead and as such the presence of the past narrated in the present is haunting and is both strange and familiar. The inexact replication of narrative in the process of history writing is defined by otherness. It is a process of change entails a transcultural move between the past and the present rendering the narratives of history transhistorical. It is a liminal process that is defined by its own liminality. For the sake of brevity, in explaining O’Connors literary account of this idea, I will focus only on the passage of the ship in both its formal and theoretical manifestations in the novel.

*Star of the Sea* is a conglomeration of various fictional modes, across which are scattered significant non-fictional elements, and is an amalgam in which form comes to mirror content in an openly suggestive way. This reflects the novel’s transcultural concerns with the reconciliation of

opposites and is very precisely illustrated in a textual formulation late in the novel in which an abstract poetic incantation is presented on the page in the clear textual form of a ship.

— STAR of the SEA —

O  
 Earth  
 unsown.  
*Ora pro nobis.*  
 Fountain Sealed.  
*Ora pro nobis.* Adam's  
 Deliverance. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Advocate of Eve. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Aqueduct of Grace. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Bride of the Canticle. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Fleece of Heaven's Rain. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Eastern Gate. *Ora pro nobis.* Flower of  
 Jesse's Root. *Ora pro nobis.* Undug Well.  
*Ora pro nobis.* Wedded to God. *Ora pro*  
*nobis.* Lily Among Thorns. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Rose Ever Flowering. *Ora pro nobis.* Garden  
 Enclosed. *Ora pro nobis.* Workshop of the  
 Incarnation. *Ora pro nobis.* House of Gold.  
*Ora pro nobis.* Joseph's Wife. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Unploughed Meadow. *Ora pro nobis.* Tower  
 of Ivory. *Ora pro nobis.* Throne of God. *Ora*  
*pro nobis.* Undeified. *Ora pro nobis.* Maid  
 Clothed in Sunlight. *Ora pro nobis.* Throne  
 of Redemption. *Ora pro nobis.* Surpassing  
 the Seraphim. *Ora pro nobis.* Treasurehouse  
 of Sanctity. *Ora pro nobis.* Surpassing Eden's  
 Meadows. *Ora pro nobis.* Mirror of Purity.  
*Ora pro nobis.* Cathedral Unassailable. *Ora*  
*pro nobis.* Spotless Dove. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Vessel of Devotion. *Ora pro nobis.* Font  
 of Virginity. *Ora pro nobis.* Virgin Most  
 Pure. *Ora pro nobis.* Unlearned in the  
 Ways of Eve. *Ora pro nobis.* Victor  
 over the Serpent. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Hope of the Exiles. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Citadel of David. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Queen of Africa. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Sisterly Mother. *Ora pro nobis.*  
 Mary Immaculate Star of the Sea.  
*Ora pro nobis.* *Ora pro nobis.*  
*Mea maxima culpa.*  
*Ora pro nobis.*

The novel has as its literary focus an effort to bring together opposing cultural forms, to transcend *differents*, and to generate an 'other space' whence the author's expostulations on history can be viewed. Here in the ship-shaped passage, this effort is manifested both thematically and structurally in O'Connor's play on text and form which intimates toward an intended interpretation of the central metaphor of the book. Within the text of the passage, the Latin words 'Ora pro nobis': *pray for us* are repeated uncountable times between references to Catholic spaces and figures such as 'Advocate of Eve... Aqueduct of Grace... Maria Immaculate... Star of the Sea...' (O'Connor 270). In these words, the central image of the ship is connected directly to an important metaphorical symbolisation. The meaning of the name Maria in Catholic tradition is, from the Hebrew, *Stella Maris*, or 'Star of the Sea'. Since ancient times, this name assumes the Virgin as a protector of travellers and sea-farers and so the image of Maria as a vessel in the apt naming of the ship is significant here as it doubles back onto the image of the famine ship as a uterine or womb-like vessel that carries its refugees and emigrants to the sanctuary awaiting them in the United States. Importantly, the combined image of the Virgin Mary and

the ship as a womb corresponds directly with the liminality of the Atlantic passage of the *Star of the Sea*. Significantly, it also inverts the standard image of the famine ships as ‘coffin ships’ (as they are known in popular cultural reference), an inversion which is brought to our attention continuously in the novel via the repeated announcement of the names of the deceased in the Captain’s record.

This highlights the fact that the passage of this ship is a laden metaphor in the text and its expansive nature is intensified by the fact that it is also literally a border crossing and this ties together the various transcultural issues that are raised in the narrative. As such, the narrative engages the reader in a transitional in-between interpretative space where ideas about culture, history and identity can be challenged and renegotiated. The image, on the one hand, suggests protection and carrying but also, significantly, rebirth. It is a pre-nascent phase before the establishment of new borders of identity. Homi K. Bhabha views the in-between space of border transition as ‘neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past.... we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion (Bhabha 2004, 1-2). Instead of focusing on the difference and division that a border crossing creates, Bhabha is more interested in the phase of transition is implied in the demarcation of a boundary. The phase of passage is an intermediate, heterogenous space where conventional notions of identity are re-evaluated and it is in this kind of space that the collective narrative of the novel takes place and its central metaphors are explored.

But the construction of new identity in the transcultural process of the immigrant passage involves another form of passage; a narrative passage. In recognising this, the novel’s processes of revising the narratives identity involves the pursuit of revisions of the narratives of history to the extent that the novel spectralises the past. The otherness of the past is reinforced and its ghostly presence in the text reflects a particular critical angle on historiography. The idea that history is uncanny is overtly highlighted in the novel in a quotation included as an epigraph to one of the closing chapters, allegedly written by a young Merredith for a school assignment: ‘history happens in the first person but is written in the third. That is what makes history a completely useless art’ (O’Connor, 386). In Riceour’s, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the very uncanniness of history, at once familiar but estranged, is discussed whereby the present is seen to be generally understood as ‘same’ while the recognised version of the past is other (Riceour, 40). As is presented in *Star of the Sea*, history is ‘the presence of the absent encountered previously’ (Riceour, 39). Things from the past are at once other but also acknowledged as ‘same’.

This notion of history as uncanny is given figurative representation in the Gothic concerns of O’Connor’s text, its dark atmosphere of mystery and suspense, its monster, and its uncanny qualities, to name a few. The dangers that lurk in the text stress the importance of the novel’s focus on destabilising history. Maeve Tynan reads this as part of O’Connor’s demonstration that ‘the passengers are under more threat from their connected histories than from their social differences’ (Tynan, 76), which makes the point that there are often unavoidable dark consequences to the production of historical narratives. In terms of these Gothic concerns with history, the darkness of life on board the *Star of the Sea* is dramatised by the possibility of supernatural presence and possibly a very real evil aboard the ship. Many of the passengers have an overt fascination with the character Pius Mulvey, personified as

‘The Monster’ in the preface to the book. This character connects a number of the histories of the characters on board, being the former husband of Mary Duane, an escaped prisoner being researched by Dixon and part of a murder plot that ad planned to assassinate Lord Merredith.

The peculiar behaviour of this mysterious figure on the deck at night introduces the novel’s Gothic aesthetic and a distinct and pervasive sense of the uncanny from the beginning. ‘All night long he would walk the ship from bow to stern, from dusk until quarterlight, that sticklike limping man from Connemara with the dropping shoulders and ash-coloured clothes’ (O’Connor xi). The narrator recalls how ‘he shifts through the vaporous darkness; cautiously, furtively, always alone, his left foot dragging as though hefting an anchor’ (O’Connor xi). He notes ‘his threadbare stateliness’ and ‘mournful’ ‘disfigured’ face and that although they couldn’t explain it, the sailors had a sense of his presence before seeing him (O’Connor, xi). Notably, in relation to the idea of the uncanny, and connecting this to historical and cultural issues, his qualities are those qualities often attributed to the devil in Irish folklore. The ‘quare fella’ as he is often referred to in an Irish context, personified by twentieth century Irish writer Brendan Behan, is an amalgamation of many European personifications of Satan; a general negative uncanny atmosphere follows in his wake; he is smooth talking and a talented liar; he often walks with a limp and or carries a cane; his eyes burn brightly or are commonly of different colours and he is almost always accompanied by a foul unsourceable stench. This very smell takes over *The Star of the Sea* as the mystery of the novel comes closer to its crescendo. *Captain Lockwood* writes in his log: ‘There is a very strange and horrible smell about the ship tonight. I do not mean the usual odour emanating from our steerage where the poor people must contend as well as they can, but something much worse and quite pestilential. It beggars description (O’Connor 152).

In terms of how the novel uses the Gothic to destabilise history and represent history as uncanny, it is important to note not just the intensity of the uncanny in this particular example of the unsourceable sulphurous stench, but also that the unspeakability of this sensory horror echoes a number of other unspeakables in the novel. The most important of these is the historical event of the famine itself. Caused by the yeast phytophthora infestans the potato blight was notoriously signalled by the overpowering foul smell of rotting and decay often associated at the time with the Devil. This is recorded in primary historical record but also in the folklore that emerged from the period. With this context in mind it is significant that this novel is one of the rare works of Irish literature that broaches the difficult history of the famine in which one million Irish people died and one and a half million people emigrated within five years. Of the most successful Irish authors, none have dealt with this topic explicitly, quite probably because of the complexity and sensitivity of the issue and also because of the difficulty encountered in trying to write about the unimaginable horrors that defined the tragedy. As such, the famine, like the experience of the uncanny is unspeakable. In the case of the uncanny, we can never say exactly what it is. The famine too, evidently has its own difficulties in representation.

This emphasises the fact that the gap between experience and narrative, between reality and the historical account, is arguably one that is beyond language; somehow unrepresentable. This gap is an evasive and subversive space. History is always haunted by a sense of its own otherness and as such is simultaneously connected and disconnected from the cultures of past and present.



*Some other issues that could be potentially discussed include how the ship functions in the novel as a Foucauldian Heterotopia and the issues of language and translation in the novel which frequently includes examples of Irish, Hiberno English and Irish presented in translation.*

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## Identity and Language in the Latvian Literature of Deportation and Exile

The themes of identity and language (or identity as expressed through language) in Latvian literature of the turn of 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century depicting deportations of some Latvians to Siberia (by the Soviet rule) and flight of other Latvians to the West (at the end of the Second World War) are treated very differently. In deportation narratives, these issues are practically not mentioned and discussed. There is very little of what Latvian-British anthropologist Vieda Skultans calls “dissenting power of the self”<sup>1</sup> in these narratives concerning limited use of the native language in the deportation settings. On the contrary, in the Latvian exile literature, whether written in Latvian or English, language and identity, or more precisely – identity through language, are among the central points.

The use of one language at the expense of neglecting others fits very well in the context of the silenced and marginalised experiences of exile and deportation in post-soviet and postcolonial literature(s). In “The Dialectics of Exile, Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures,” Sophia A. McClennen concludes that “Authoritarian regimes control language in order to maintain power. In these situations the use of propaganda and censorship highlight the difference between what is experienced and what language describes. The exiled subject must confront the loss of identity at a moment in history when, due to authoritarianism in their nations, the notion of the self and its relationship to language has become extremely fragile”<sup>2</sup>.

The native language of those deported and exiled became useless outside their families and ethnic communities. They had to speak a *de facto* lingua franca. In the case of exile, they spoke the language of the hosting or destination country. In the case of Soviet deportations carried out in 1940 and 1949, they spoke Russian. Russian was a *lingua franca* both because it was the language of the authority and also because other deportees came from nationally and/or linguistically different parts of the Soviet Union or other Central and East European countries and a common language was a necessity.

Wide use of Russian by deported Latvians is a case of *forced mimicry*. Deportees depicted in the novels by Melānija Vanaga, Anita Liepa and Sandra Kalniete kind of smoothly, without questioning and protests started using Russian in their communication with the world outside their families and groups of other Latvians. Some Latvians already knew Russian, though many, especially children, did not. This affected deported people’s ability to find work and thus eventually to survive. In the novel of Melānija Vanaga there is mention of a Latvian woman with three young children. The mother cannot find a place to stay as she cannot generate any income because she does not know Russian, thus there is no way for her to find any paid work.

In the novel “Veļupes krastā” (1991), the son of the narrator was 14 when he and his mother were deported to Siberia. The boy had to start working a couple of days after their arrival in the kolkhoz

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<sup>1</sup> Skultans, Vieda. Arguing with the KGB Archives. Archival and Narrative Memory in Post-Soviet Latvia. *Ethnos*. Vol. 66:3, 2001, p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> McClennen, Sophia A. *The Dialectics of Exile. Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures*, West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2004, p.121.

(Russian for a collective farm) in a Siberian village. The Latvian teenager did not know a single word in Russian, but he had to work completely in the Russian language environment from his first day at work. The mother claims that after a week her son could functionally communicate in Russian to deal with his work responsibilities. The mother is ashamed of also the rude language the boy is using not realising himself what some of the words he has picked up from the other kolkhoz workers really mean.

There was neither lead time nor instruction given so that deportees from Latvia and other places where Russian was not *lingua franca* like Baltic States and Central and Eastern European could learn Russian. Language as a part of human identity is touched very little in the literature of deportations. It leads to a conclusion that both the practice of acquiring the new language and the language policy itself were muted. These were issues somehow dealt with but never brought to the level of public discussion by either the authority or the deported people. The issues of languages are mentioned but never discussed in depth in the deportation narratives, though the language was an important part of identity, social and professional status and even survival.

Often deported people's names were russified (by adding the father's name with a special suffix to a person's first name). The deportees were called in names that differed from their original names. In her novel "With Dance Shoes in the Snows of Siberia" (2001), Sandra Kalniete talks about her grandmother who never got used to be addressed by the Russian variant of her name.

The narratives about deportations do not mention any instruction in Russian for either adults or children even though people were expected to communicate in it immediately after being placed in the villages in Siberia. Public schooling was carried out only in Russian. How and whether at all Latvian children learnt reading and writing Latvian in their families is never even mentioned in the relevant narratives.

The narratives about fleeing Latvia at the end of the Second World War and arriving at Western European countries reveal a totally different picture concerning identity and language. The language of the exile and the process of acquiring it are central issues alongside longing for the homeland, employment, housing, and education in the exile countries.

The Latvian-American author Agate Nesaule in her novel "A Woman in Amber" (1995) talks about how challenging it felt to learn English when her family reached the USA after years of life in a displaced person's (DP) camp in Germany after the Second World War. The novel also depicts how alienated elder generation felt because of their inability to speak and learn English.

Nesaule in her novel investigates the ways in which "otherness" is constructed. One of the mechanisms, along with politically, ethnically and socially determined boundaries, is language. Nesaule looks at the importance of language from at least three angles: firstly, language as a means to verbalise the traumatic experience, secondly, language/voice as a way of self-identification and individuation (in her case from the mother), and thirdly, language also as a means of isolation and marginalisation.

Nesaule's novel "A Woman in Amber" reveals a success story. Protagonist Agate learnt English very well and it even became the basis for her professional affiliation as a professor of English and American literature. Many other people of her parents', and even her own generation, never achieved a decent level of English, thus staying outside (serious) professional circles.

If a person speaks the language of a place well, he/she has the chance to get good education. If he/she does not, this inability jeopardises the person's ability to stay in the mainstream. The dual functioning of a language is illustrated by the fate of Uldis, the husband of Agate's sister Beate.

Uldis parents' family was settled in the South, where they worked on the plantations. "Uldis spoke a heavily accented English that included both black and southern patterns".<sup>3</sup> Apart from the English, which always set him apart in any academic setting, Uldis never became a USA citizen, because his parents pleaded with him not to go to the war in Korea, on the grounds that he was the only son. This closed doors to state jobs for Uldis. He would write excellent papers in history in college, but when the professor asked Uldis to speak up in class and talk about his report, he would be frightened because of his English: "Goddamn, I ain't fooled by de damn professor. If he hear me say somethin' he not gonna give me no A".<sup>4</sup>

Uldis never got a stable professional and eventually died of alcoholism.

For Agate to learn English is not only to overcome one form of 'otherness', but also to break free, at least to an extent, from the mother, by establishing identity that is her own and different of her mother's.

In both exile/emigrant and deportee experiences language was an issue of inclusion and exclusion even though the issue of using and acquiring the new language itself is treated very differently. In exile literature issues of identity and language are openly discussed while in the narratives about deportations these issues are excluded and silenced.

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<sup>3</sup> Nesaule, Agate. *A Woman in Amber. Healing the Trauma of War and Exile*. New York: Penguin Book, 1995, p. 264.

<sup>4</sup> Nesaule, Agate. *A Woman in Amber. Healing the Trauma of War and Exile*. New York: Penguin Book, 1995, p. 264.

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**“Now tell me whether one can draw any parallels here,/Or worse, concentric circles”<sup>5</sup>: Bilingual Poetry Collections in Latvia**

After a brief period of national unity and common joy over regaining the independence in the beginning of the 90s, Latvia entered a new stage in constructing its national identity. It is not a secret that post-Soviet Latvia has been torn into halves ever since, each part glued not so much by ethnicity but by language. Thus, the crude labels ‘Latvians’ and ‘Russians’ stand for the ‘title nation’ and the ‘invaders’ (*okupanti*) and designate the deep divide politically and subconsciously settled in the minds of Latvian populace.

For those living in the country now it is virtually impossible to account objectively for the real differences in group mentality, to overcome cultural stereotypes and contest antagonistic views on Latvian history - all these factors do not allow for a proper social integration and healthy formation of national identity. Still the political climate and mass media response do not reveal the whole story, and a close-up on the state of affairs in cultural domain could add several strokes to the overall picture. Language and culture are two intermingling phenomena, and poetry, the arguably most mobile zone of culture, is in the crossroads of the two; with culture recognised as a site of conflict for authority or power, the research into poetic dynamics and cultural policies involved in poetry production may yield interesting results. Thus, the paper focuses on bilingual Latvian-Russian poetry collections and particularly those published by the poetic textgroup “Orbita” in the last decade. The interest is not in the content, but in choice criteria, general publishing policies and, significantly, the design as such. Since bilingualism in this case is a result of/motivation to translation, the later is broadly understood not only as the transfer of texts from one language into another, but as cultural negotiation. The aim of the paper is to look at how different types of transactions are mediated, that is how successful are the attempts of the poets to use the subversive power of translation and juxtaposition, and to prove that “Orbita”’s projects with their conscious attempts of re-creating the contact zone and celebration of in-betweenness, fully correspond to the spirit of the age.

### **Context**

For the fuller understanding of the topic, several words should be added to the said above on the political stance of Latvia in respect of language. For this purpose, I chose to quote an article from the representative volume “Latvia and Latvians. A People and a State in Ideas, Images and Symbols” (2010) published under the aegis of the State Research Programme “National Identity”. The article “Latvian language as a state language: As a symbol, As a form of communication, or the foundation for statehood?” is written by Prof. Ina Druviete, a Latvian sociolinguist and the former Minister of Education and Science (2004-2006).

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<sup>5</sup> Marts Pujāts „Man zvanija režisors” in *Par mums* (2009), Rīga: Orbita, p.85 (translation mine)

“The state language – Latvian – is the everyday means of communication, and alongside the Flag, the Hymn, and the Coat of Arms, it is symbolic of the state of Latvia. It is also potentially the common language of communication for a fully integrated society.” (145)

“...language as an element of identity is being interpreted as this language’s collective consciousness and does not bear any direct relationship to the factual hierarchy of language or to any legal status. Ethnos in the majority of circumstances identifies itself with the appropriate linguistic idiom independently of its official definition in any legal act. It is true though that such an identification of language may be suppressed or further facilitated along particular political pathways.” (165)

“The backbone concept of Latvian language policy is that the Latvian language is the only language of the state and it has the highest status in the hierarchy of languages.” (166)

“For the time being though, it is not possible to assert that the Latvian language has lost its importance as an element of collective identity, although a demonstrated national nihilism has been seen to increase of late, perhaps as a result of the economic crisis.” (153-4)

The real linguistic situation in Latvia is that Russian minority (having grown rapidly after WWII as a result of transplanting policies of the USSR) presents a large community with a different linguistic consciousness, and the integration of its part is still an issue. In general, culture may not directly correlate with politics, and ethnic diversity can significantly enrich the former, though much depends on the local context. The only invariably common stance of both Latvian and Russian mass media is that the two communities do not have much in common.

### **Bilingual collections of poetry: history**

It’s quite hard to do a serious research into bilingual editions of the Soviet years, for the unified Catalogue of the Libraries of National Significance does not cover the smaller and regional libraries and the most representative Latvian National Library catalogue has not been fully computerized. The personal talk with experienced librarians proved the conjecture that only pro-Soviet and officially approved Latvian poets were translated into Russian, and hardly any Russian language poets of Latvia were translated. Bilingual Latvian-Russian poetry collections were practically non-existent because of the lack of commission and probably interest as well. Thus, this parallel development of the two cultures in the Republic was definitely not beneficial for the Russian counterpart, neglected and provincial as it was.

### **Russian poetry in Latvia before and in the 90s**

We could hardly link the contemporary Latvian Russian poetry to the Russian literature in Latvia during the First Republic (1918-1940), though Riga was one of Russian cultural centres, the fact explainable by

the active transit of Russian emigrants to the West. “Within the system of the Grand Soviet Literature, censored poetry was granted the role of a provincial ‘tributary’ falling into the voluminous flow of literary processes directed from Moscow.” (Timofejev, 55) A new generation of poets appeared amid the cultural opposition in the first part of the 1980s; the break from the Soviet aesthetics brought them closer to the underground literature of Leningrad and Moscow. However, already in 1989 the Russian scholar Vladimir Toporov wrote that Russian culture in Latvia “can be understood neither in complete isolation from the Latvian context, nor as a culture identical with that of Russia” (Timofejev, 57).

The bigger part of poets concentrated in Riga and around the magazine “Avots/Родник” (*The Spring*). “Родник” (1987-1993), initially the Russian version of “Avots”, was quite popular in the post-Soviet space too, but lost state funding and became expensive for the subscribers living outside Latvia. After “Rodnik”, the literary journal “Daugava” attempted to take over the cultural authority but with lesser success. The local Russian literature, poetry included, was in an undisputable crisis. Despite the continuous talk in Russian critical circles about the phenomenon of ‘emigration without emigration’, i.e. “the situation when without any initiative on their part, multiple authors occurred outside the country where their language, culture and literature had occupied the central place, as a result of the collapse of the USSR” (Кузьмин, transl. is mine), five young (born in 1970-1977s), ethnic Russian poets organized “Orbita”, and the new literary group “attempted to ‘master’ the new situation and developed original ways of presenting poetic texts, incorporating the audial and visual media, so as to attract the Russian and Latvian audiences alike.” (Timofejev, 64)

After the brief outline, it is important to add that Latvia is the only post-Soviet country where recognizably both ‘titular’ and minority group poets have always been engaged in a creative dialogue. Despite the insistence of Russian criticism on constructing the identity of any ethnic Russian poet living outside Russia as pulled to one of two poles, i.e. the pole of emigration or the pole of diaspora, Latvian Russian younger poets refuse to be stereotyped. Already in the end of the 1980s Latvia was marked by an existence of a unique cultural layer of Latvians and Russians in their 20s-30s. The unity supported by nonverbal factors was poetically formulated by the poet and translator Sergei Moreino as the strong aura of Riga, all-pervading ‘bi-alphabetism’, and the feeling of belonging to the Baltic oecumene. Today, mutually enriching cultural interaction is particularly intensive among younger poets, and the existence of bilingual poetry collections, and particularly the volumes published by “Orbita” graphically testify to the trend.

### **Bilingual collections: state of art**

Taking into account the irregularity and incompleteness of the classificatory system of the Catalogue of the Libraries of National Significance, the number of Latvian-Russian bilingual volumes of poetry published during the last decade is not big, and all the books could be roughly subdivided into 4 groups: 1. books of regional poetry, e.g. the multilingual (Latvian, Russian, Ukrainian, Belarus, Polish, German) poetry collection “Baltic Wind” (2010) (I found 4 titles published during the last decade) → quite traditional, often of questionable artistic merit, having limited readership → using the standard side by side original-translation placement on opposing pages;

2. books published as an individual effort both in and outside Latvia (since they are most often catalogued idiosyncratically, there is no precise number but hardly more than 10 titles) → of interest to the circles close to the author/publisher → using the same format as group 1.

The exceptional examples are issues 3 and 4 of the Moscow series “Молодая поэзия мира” (Young Poetry of the World); the two thin books of Latvian poetry translated into Russian by “Orbita” members with the support of the State Culture Capital Foundation (SCCF) of Latvia are:

Kārlis Vērdiņš „Titri/Титры” (*Credits*) (2003)<sup>6</sup>

Marts Pujāts „Divzvaigžņu baznīcas/Двухзвездочные церкви” (*Two Star Churches*) (2005)

3. Sergei Moreino’s translational endeavour → characterised by the orientation to Russia (since the end of the 90s Moreino lives in Moscow though he has regularly participated in local projects ever since), 12 books (as catalogued) contain the mix of Latvian contemporary and his own poetry → the books’ design can be hardly accounted systematically or/and conceptually and governed by Moreino’s aesthetic motivations;

4. the textgroup “Orbita” projects

1) Науда/Dengi: dzeja par naudu/стихи о деньгах (2001) – *Money. Poems about money*

It is the first “Orbita” attempt to present poetry as independent of language by mixing poems in Latvian and Russian united by the same topic. The semantics and visuals of the book come into one multimodal blend: published as a chequebook where each page/cheque is filled with one poem signed by its poet, the collection has only two invariables, namely the year (2001) and the place (Rīga). 29 pages of the chequebook leave three unfilled blanks at the end prompting the reader to join.

2) Sergei Timofeyev “Почти фотографии / Gandrīz fotogrāfijas” (2003) – *Almost Photos*

The simplicity of the layout and the empty left page of each opening create the room for thought, inclusion, imagination. The tête-bêche format and layout itself stress the dialogism of the contact zone.

3) Semyon Khanin „только что/tikko” (2003) – *just*

This bilingual, visually minimalist edition consists of two books (original and translation) mirroring one another as the tête-bêche, though each book having its own cover are put in a cardboard box of the same grey colour. The encased two volumes question the nature of bondage and accepted hierarchy, and address the issues of fixation and compromise.

4) Inga Gaile “Kūku Marija” (2007) – *Cake Marija* -

This third book of poetry by the young Latvian poetess contains several of her poems experimentally written in Russian.

5) “SOVEREMENNAJA RUSSKAJA POEZIJA LATVII” (2008) – *CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN POETRY IN LATVIA*

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<sup>6</sup> Born in 1979, Vērdiņš is the only young Latvian poet included in the most representative reference guide “300 Baltic writers : Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania” (2009) as “one of the most visible of the younger generation of Latvian poets” (352).



This anthology of contemporary Latvian Russian poetry is in fact a three-language collection (Russian, Latvian and English) and the most ambitious “Orbita” project by now testifying to the existence of contemporary Latvian Russian culture.

6) Kārlis Vērdiņš, Māris Salējs, Marts Pujāts, Pēteris Draguns “Par mums/За нас” (2009) – *To us*

The book of the best contemporary Latvian poetry is a crossbreed of standard side by side original-translation placement and tête-bêche. The mismatch of mirrored enumeration, the irregularity of the black margins, all these and other aspects of the design make the experience fragmented, and the integrity of ‘we’ questionable.

### **Some concluding remarks**

Translation is always ideologically implicated for it involves representation, and “Orbita”’s elaborate representational strategies remind us of Jose Ortega y Gasset’s affirmation “that translation is a literary genre apart, different from the rest, with its own norms and own ends.” (in Venuti, 61)

“A translation is a linguistic “zone of contact” between the foreign and translating cultures, but also within the latter. ... If the domestic inscription includes part of the social or historical context in which the foreign text first emerged, then a translation can also create a community that includes foreign intelligibilities and interests, an understanding in common with another culture, another tradition.” (Venuti, 477) There is no insurmountable rift between the two linguistic cultures, and the gap as such could become a source of artistic expression.

The linguistic diversity, “the foregrounding of the manipulative powers of the translator and a view of translation as bridge-building across the space between source and target” (Bassnett, 10) have become a definitive mark of “Orbita” and their individual creative works.

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### **Language Purity and Language Imperialism: Why East European Language Cultures of Lesser Use Distrust Translation Practices that Move in the Direction of Transculturation, Hybridity and Globalization**

Maria Tymoczko, a specialist in translation theory within the context of postcolonialism, makes an assertion that is fundamental to this paper, writing that translation “is powerful and it is not innocent” (Tymoczko 1999: 18). Indeed, my experiences in both Quebec and Lithuania have convinced me that translation is an extremely volatile issue, arousing, often unexpectedly, very strong emotions. Recently I found an interesting example in a sports blog on the Celtics basketball team, where a writer describes the further careers of players who no longer belong to the club. His brief article “What the Hell Happened to ...Brandon Hunter” (15 May 2011) explains that the player now works for a Latvian team, Ventspils Klub, and then is ironic about how this club has translated the American’s name into Latvian as “Brendon Hanters”, joking that it might be fun to do the same in reverse for a Latvian athlete, Andris Biedrins. For two days this provoked fifteen comments, only a few of them about Hunter as a basketball player. Most of the heated responses were about the latvianization of Hunter’s name, with Latvian and Czech writers largely defending the practice of translating proper nouns and English-speaking ones refusing to see any valid reason for it. One Latvian points out that Americans also translate names, since Biedrins’ name should end with an “s” with a diacritical mark to indicate it is pronounced “sh”. An American riposte that there is no such key on his computer sends a Latvian over the top into furious obscenity: “This is the biggest SHIT what I have read! The Author is a bitch ass licker and likes to masturbate when he sees Brandon Hunter. What the problems you have? Small brains, definitely (“What the Hell Happened”)”. This violent response to criticism of translation practices is not unusual among minority-language users – those whose languages are not spoken by billions of people, and who are uneasy about the rapid eruption of English into languages and global communication.

If we think about the concept of the transcultural and its links with colonial and postcolonial issues of power, as well as feelings of humiliation and helplessness among the colonized, then these strong emotions become more understandable. The notion of the transcultural evokes the movement of ideas and practices, as well as cultural phenomena, from one society to another. Usually it is associated with elements of force, with one of the societies as imperial, dominant, a conqueror, while the other is inferior in power, yet possibly rebellious and resistant. In current studies on cultural translation, this binary pair is beginning to be associated with what are known as majority and minority languages and their relations through translation. Imperialistic behavior is now characteristic of certain majority languages outside the older imperial pattern; it can occur between countries like, say, the United States and Lithuania or Finland with no historical relations of empire and colony.

For East European language societies, literary systems that have just recently broken free of the ideological restrictions imposed by Communist regimes, entry into the so-called “free world” and its free-market system has produced very ambiguous results. What is seen in Anglo-American discussions as opening

doors to other cultures through literary translations turns out to function as a new form of cultural imperialism, all the harder to resist because it operates within a market system. This paper looks at how the choices made at different levels of translation become vitally important for countries that equate national identity with linguistic distinctiveness. Still, though many countries feel a sense of unease about what English is doing to their national languages, their responses vary. For example, in a post-soviet country like Lithuania, many official and academic Lithuanians are less concerned with the breaking of norms in the *contents* of translated literature than in the breaking of *language* norms.

Until fairly recently, Western translation studies have been dominated by French and English researchers, and the French-English language pair. From a theoretical point of view this is unfortunate, as a good number of their generalizations work poorly for Indo-European languages with complex systems for declining nouns and much freer word order. It is not accidental that the languages used by the leading Western imperial states of the past three centuries have dominated scholarship, especially since a large number of European languages were cut off from free intellectual exchange because of communist regimes. Therefore, approaches from minority languages tend to be left out of academic discussion.

In the past two decades translation studies have flourished, encouraged by political changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the widespread use of the internet and a general movement in philological studies towards applied linguistics. What is known in translation studies as the ‘cultural turn’ refers to focusing on the very specific context in which a translated text is produced. Translators themselves are increasingly seen as authors of new texts so that instead of a prescriptive approach which looks for mistakes in translation, specialists now identify the strategies used and argue reasons for the choices that are made.

A more contextual approach to translation actually started in the 1970s with polysystem theory, first developed in Tel Aviv by Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury. Then, in the 1990s Anglo-American researchers also became interested in seeing the translated text as the product of social, economic, political and ideological forces. Soon East European specialists began to add their own perspective. For example, both Latvian Ieva Zauberga (1999, 2003) and Lithuanian Regina Rudaityte (2006) point out that their translation cultures have their own traditions and norms.

The most detailed discussion on translation and national identity within the current English-dominated framework is provided by Irish scholars. I have already quoted Tymoczko in her claim that the translation process is a powerful one that is “not innocent” (1999: 18). Emer O’Sullivan argues that the so-called “internationalization of culture” is “Coca-Colonization”, and notes the domination of American products, especially in youth culture, emphasizing that the driving force is commercial interests (2005: 149). One of the best analyses of the problems that minority languages are facing, and how this is related to translation and identity is Michael Cronin’s 2003 book *Translation and Globalization*. In his analysis of the effects of monocultural imperial power, Cronin refers to what he calls “space-time compression” (2003: 121-122). In the last twenty years or so, many countries have had to catch up very hastily to free-market business procedures and information technology. The easiest strategy for translators is simply to reproduce or minimally adapt the dominant terms – which are almost always English (Cronin 2003: 122).

Lithuanians, for example, often just add the necessary endings to English nouns related to computer technology so that these can be grammatically declined: hence ‘toner’ becomes ‘toneris’, ‘printer’ – ‘printeris’ and so on. Even when a simple Lithuanian equivalent is found, as when ‘printeris’ becomes ‘spausdintuvas’, a

thing that prints, the English term appears more often in advertisements and everyday conversations in academic, governmental and business offices.

Cronin explores the consequences of this invasion of terminology needed to integrate a culture and economy into the global system: minority languages like Hungarian, he explains, now seem “premodern” and “underdeveloped”, losing prestige among their speakers (2003: 122) – I would add, especially among the young. In Lithuania the daily use of such foreignisms enrages language patriots: after decades of fighting off the russification of Lithuanian, now the battle against anglicization is being readily given up by those who run the country’s major institutions.

Finally, Cronin indicates how little respect even translation specialists show for the point of view of minority languages. As he states, minority language concerns are dismissed as “ethnocentric chauvinism”, “purism” or “ethnic cleansing” (Cronin 2003: 147-148). Further, in the present world system, Cronin asserts, the dominance of English in technological development has turned other languages, even those spoken by millions of people, into minority languages as well (Cronin 2003: 146). In other words, global culture is moving at high speeds towards the creation of a monolingual and monocultural system.

Minority languages like Lithuanian, Hungarian and Latvian that are not considered at risk of disappearance but which have long histories of struggling for survival are presently the scenes of a very fascinating polarization of public opinion. Here we can speak in postcolonial terms of a dominant imperial centre (the English language, but especially its American and British cultural varieties) and a host of dominated colonial sites, mainly but not exclusively minority languages. I will focus on the way in which resistance is expressed in one area of language politics, the translation of proper nouns, especially the names of people and places. There are two major issues here: the transcription of the foreign name so that it can be properly pronounced; and the issue of moving from a language like English that has a very limited declension system to one like Lithuanian that has a complex one. Traditionally English-language specialists hold that the foreign name should be reproduced as it is, while other languages, especially minority ones, prefer a form of adaptation to their own rules.

On the level of theory, a number of English-language linguists, as Maria Tymoczko shows, see names as having no semantic meaning: they are simply “labels signalling reference [...] arbitrary signifiers” and so should not be translated (1999:224). For example, it would be wrong to render President Bush’s last name by the equivalent botanical term in another language. However, in a large number of languages, both past and present, as Tymoczko explains, names may have semantic meaning or at least “function as sociolinguistic signs, indicating tribal and family affiliation; gender and class; racial, ethnic, national and religious identity” (1999:224). Indeed, the English position on names is not characteristic of most societies, even though in modern translation studies, it is presented as a rule (1999:232-234).

Nor do English speakers play according to the rule that they set. Bruno Osimo has pointed out the English inclination to double consonants quite unnecessarily, as in giving “Yidish” a double “d”, to say nothing of the many variants for Russian names: he explains this as a tendency “towards adaptation, comfort, despite [...] philological correctness” (2008). Another translation specialist, Veronica Albin, describes a Spanish study on the history of the translation of names which an American colleague labelled “nonsense” without having read it; she reports that she had hoped to draw up a set of rules but found only arbitrary conventions, a series of “fads” in the translation of names (2003).

The same kind of inconsistency turns up in many modern languages, as the internet language forum WordReference shows in the answers to two questions: “Do you translate foreign names in your language?” and “Do you decline foreign names?” Up until fairly recently, it seems that almost everyone translated the names of royalty, and some majority languages like Spanish continue to do this, while German selectively does it for princes from the Netherlands or Norway but not for ones from the UK. Contemporary American presidents, however, are not treated as royalty in this respect.

In internet discussions the Anglo-American comments seem to be based on the notion of respecting a person’s name. However, it is noticeable that Anglo-American practice is far from respectful of foreign names. The Asian practice of putting the family name first is blithely reversed. References to people who have double last names often simply alphabetize by the second of these. The version of the Roman alphabet used in English is treated as the only possible one, with even the French often not getting their diacritical marks.

On the other hand, as Cronin acknowledges, shutting off a minority language from the linguistic changes that come from contact, including translation, guarantees an unhealthy state of cultural stagnation. Bill Ashcroft writes optimistically of transculturation as “that mutual alteration which occurs when two cultures come into contact” (2001: 122). Yet, is the present situation one of mutual alteration and mutual respect? Minority-language users argue that it is patently not. In terms of the literary market, any English-language reader, with a very large market of publications annually and only a tiny percentage of them translations, may very well never read a translated text. In Lithuania, with a much smaller pool of published texts and nearly 80% of them translations, readers are compelled to make contact with the foreign – and may even lose contact with their native literary culture. Lexical issues like the translations of names, too, are only the tip of the iceberg: more profound changes in a minority language are beginning to take place at the syntactical level. It is not surprising that East Europeans, like other minority-language cultures, are worried.

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## **Translating English into English: An Exploration into Academic Publishing and English Standards**

In *Talking Power: The Politics of Language*, Robin Tolmach Lakoff writes, “How well language is used translates directly into how well one’s needs are met, into success or failure, climbing to the top of the hierarchy or settling around the bottom” (13). As English is now considered the global standard for business, politics and most international communication, one might amend this to say that success is based on “How well the *English* language is used.”

This proves increasingly true in academics where, to achieve any sort of international notoriety in one’s field, one must publish in English; moreover, one must succeed at the special language of Academic English, the so-called “Academese.” The special sort of English required for publication in leading journals acts, according to Lakoff, as a sort of secret handshake, a code for who is “in” or “out” of the elite club of professionals in the field. An editor or reader may judge the quality of the argument and intellect and educational background of the academic by his or her ability to know and use Academese proficiently. An author is deemed to have more authority (or perhaps even more right to be published) because s/he has not only learned the language, but has proven herself or himself a member of the culture.

In a chapter titled “How to Write Like a Professor,” Lakoff highlights the importance of Academese to a career by pointing to the fact that “a significant part of a student’s training involves . . . learning how to sound right as well as how to make valid contributions.” (158)

At the same time, however, not every student of English as a second language has the same opportunity to learn “how to sound right.” Thus, academics outside of the U.S., Britain, Canada or Australia who need to publish in English—and they do, because publications in high-ranking, English journals translate directly into research money—are at a clear disadvantage. In particular, those living in countries that do not demand an education in English at the primary and secondary school levels struggle even more.

In 1983, Larry Smith offered a rather idealistic view of English as an International Language, writing: “English belongs to the world and every nation which uses it, even if it does so with a different tone, colour and quality” (*Readings in English as an International Language* 1). Language, however, is always political and the power structures in place to promote standards simultaneously shut out and debase variants.

Dr. Iman Laversuch, an American sociolinguist in the English Department at the University of Cologne in Germany, recently posed the following question on a listserv regarding her experiences in guest editing a special journal issue: “To make sure that this issue included the perspectives and interests of our international audience, I took great pains to invite authors from around the world to submit papers. In the end, however, I found that it was exceedingly difficult to find authors outside of the English-speaking world who had sufficient skills in academic English to produce texts satisfactory for

publication. As a direct result of this experience, I became extremely interested to know what the experience and opinions of other professional editors have been.”

I responded to her because in addition to teaching I “språkvask”—a job that translates literally as “language wash.” This means that I am contracted to standardize the English of articles and books prior to publication for academics writing in English as a second language. (You will note that Dr. Laversuch specified authors “with sufficient skills in *academic* English,” which is what leading publishers require.) While my job involves the correction of language errors, the majority of my time is spent in refining style and register.

This was of interest to Dr. Laversuch, who then sent me further questions about how I edit. One in particular caught my attention, as I sensed it was of key importance in connection with theories of transculturation and global englishes: “Where and how do you draw the line between adhering to the norms of Anglo-American academia and preserving the personal and/or national style differences?” The easy answer, although not the one that I am comfortable with, is that I take great pains to ensure that the style conforms to the standards of either British or American English, which means erasing all evidence of the author’s foreign national identity.

One could argue that personal identity should always be hidden in academic writing because one should strive to be as objective and scientifically distanced as possible from the subject. But when one recalls that the three major standards in place today in academic publishing come from British and American style guides (the Chicago Manual of Style, the Modern Language Association, and the Modern Humanities Research Association), Academic English is not as neutral as we might like to think. It is decidedly Western, and certainly Anglo. Although in recent years varieties of English such as Australian English, Canadian English, South African English and even Korean and Jamaican English have been codified into dictionaries and thereby validated, even Australian publishers require that their writers adhere to the standards set out by style guides in the U.S. and Britain.

Following are some examples of how I have moulded a “national style” into what I would call an Academic English style.

The first sentence of an article by a German author was twelve lines long and the second was eight lines, both containing a multitude of colons and semi-colons. While the German language allows for long, complicated sentences, this was a mouthful and a headache in English. I split the two sentences up into four. My German author was exceedingly angry with me and responded that he speaks and writes fluently in English: who was I to correct him? Unfortunately for him, the publisher agreed with me.

In another paper I recently edited the author began what came to be a tiresome amount of sentences with “but.” Knowing that “but” is a typical way to begin a sentence in Norwegian, I substituted “however” or “nevertheless,” and combined overly short sentences with semi-colons.

This author responded: “Don’t spend time on changing sentences that start with ‘But...’. I am aware of the rule that this should be avoided in written English but there are native English speakers who are outstanding writers who don’t avoid such sentences. I strive to write as to-the-point as possible and then such sentences are a help rather than a problem. Also, a high frequency of short sentences is part of my personal style in Norwegian ...”



I do not yet know the journal's response to his submission, but I do recognize that in making his work sound more "academic" I was trying to make it sound less Norwegian, even though this particular academic is fluent and articulate in English.

The opposite view on personal style was shared by a Czech author with whom I have worked for several years who has always asked that I "correct" anything that does not sound as though it was written by a native speaker. I was unable to copyedit her most recent book and so she found someone else. She writes:

"We have just received a devastating review from Brill on our upcoming volume on miscellanies ... a British reader was shocked and disgusted about the language. So, I am really very, very grateful for your help—I see again and again that the way you manage this is rare, and I am very happy you agree to help us."

My intent here is not to boast, but to show that the immense amount of rewriting I do to make a text *sound* as though it were written by a native speaker is precisely what is required by some publishers. Articles that do not meet the standards of Academic English are often either rejected outright or the publisher or journal asks that the author find a *native speaker* to edit the paper before resubmitting.

Whether Academic English and the practices of "språkvask" present examples of cultural appropriation or cultural dominance and imperialism is debatable. One could argue that English publications do exist in Scandinavia and elsewhere that are more accepting of variances in style and language, yet by and large these journals are ranked lower, meaning that it is easier for an academic to succeed (by way of more research points, more research money, and rising to the level of professor) if he or she adheres to the English standards set by the level 2 British and American journals and publishing houses.

Proponents of "standard English" (whatever that may mean) counter-argue that writing should conform to conventional norms because the language should not distract from or confuse the message. Standards, however, are not handed down from gods but come into being as they become more widely used and more familiar.

English is, without a doubt, a global language, but it is by no means homogenized. English has become a transcultural language that bears the traces of intercultural and intralingual communities. This is often best exemplified in fiction where authors like Salman Rushdie and Sandra Cisneros incorporate non-English and non-standard English languages and phrases to highlight the transcultural identities of their characters and the mixed cultures in which they reside. Rushdie's refusal to translate certain Hindi phrases into English and Cisneros' sprinkling of Spanish throughout her stories help to make the non-standard more standard.

R. A. Rogers has noted that transculturation is "an ongoing process of absorption and transformation rather than static configurations of practices." ("Cultural Appropriation" 495). A readiness to accommodate the ongoing process of transformation in the English language was the theme of this year's 45<sup>th</sup> annual TESOL conference, titled: "Examining the 'E' in TESOL." Macmillan Publishers have also signalled a desire to do away with static and outdated practices of teaching English by recently introduced a new English course called "Global." According to the publishers, this course recognizes that "English nowadays is just as often used for communication between non-native speakers

as it is between native speakers,” and therefore uses recordings of non-native speakers to teach spoken English (<http://www.macmillanglobal.com/>).

Nevertheless, while the rest of the world is moving towards a recognition of English as a language belonging to anyone who wishes to speak it, academia still employs a system of gatekeepers (editorial boards, peer-reviewers, style guides) to ensure that American and British standards are maintained. Static configurations and practices have come to characterize—if not strictly define—academic writing.

In 1789, just thirty-five years after the publication of Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language*, and amidst much discussion about authoritative standards for the English language, the Englishman Philip Withers wrote that language remained the best opportunity for the upper-class to demonstrate and maintain its rank (Machan, *Language Anxiety*, OUP, 2009). What, then, is gained by academics who wish to maintain and perpetuate a strict definition of Academic English? What would it mean for academic publishers to embrace other englishes? And would this call for a radical reconceptualization of the very culture of academia?

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**Robert Mugabe's *Inside the Third Chimurenga* and Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys*: A Counterpoint (WIP, not for citation)**

In her introduction to the rerelease of the original 1908 edition of *Scouting for Boys*, Elleke Boehmer observes that in 'recent years critics such as Homi Bhabha and Gyan Prakash have offered incisive analyses of the colonial text as inherently unstable, fissured with contradictions (most typically, denying the humanity of the colonized, yet betraying a neurotic awareness of their presence).' (Boehmer xxv)<sup>7</sup> My central claim in this paper is that Zimbabwean postcolonial nationalism is similarly ruptured by such contradictions: on the surface, stridently critical of colonialism and neo-colonialism and yet often inadvertently and neurotically rehearsing the very logics, forms and styles of imperialism.

This idea is a central claim of my current book project, entitled *Zimbabwe on Edge*, and is grounded in Achille Mbembe's elaboration of the idea of entanglement in his book, *On the Postcolony*. Mbembe states: "[as] an age, the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an *entanglement*" (Mbembe 14). The aim of the full chapter, of which this presentation forms only a part, seeks concretely to demonstrate such entanglements via a contrapuntal reading of Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* (1908) and Robert Mugabe's *Inside the Third Chimurenga* (2001).

Just as Boehmer points to the ways in which the 'rules, rituals, ethos and organization' of the Scouting movement was an 'invented tradition' in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's sense, and that the founding text *Scouting for Boys* is the material of that invention, so too will I argue that Mugabe's text is an extended exercise in the invention of history and tradition (Ranger, 'Patriotic History'); one that, despite its stated anti-imperialist aims, can also be seen to draw extensively upon the traditions of empire.

*Scouting for Boys* is used as a counterpoint to demonstrate this entanglement. I do not mean to suggest that Mugabe's text overtly responds to or is directly influenced by that text specifically.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, at first glance, one cannot imagine two more starkly different texts. As Boehmer tells us, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, first published in a six-part edition in 1908 became, 'within only a few decades...one of the most widely published, popular books of the twentieth century' (xi)<sup>9</sup> It drew on contemporary genres of popular imperialism prevalent in other forms of writing for children (and adults): for example, as Boehmer informs us, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) and *The Jungle Books* (1894-5) (Boehmer xviii), magazines and papers aimed at boy readers, such as *Boy's Own*

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<sup>7</sup> Bhabha, H. *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995) and Prakash, G *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> It is possible, of course, that Mugabe knows B-P's text, (evidence), but my aim is not to establish influence, direct or otherwise.

<sup>9</sup> Boehmer notes that the book's 'publishing figures until after the Second World War were exceeded only by those of the Bible in the English-speaking world' (xi, footnote 1)

*Paper* (xxix), or the ‘stories based on the heroic exploits of Tommy Atkins or his superior officer throughout the colonial world’ (Warren 379).

*Inside*, on the other hand, is a government publication, released by ZANU(PF)’s notoriously censorious and paranoid Department of Information and Publicity (on an extremely low budget), and is never sold in stores. It is published as a ‘training manual’ for Zimbabwe’s National Youth Service, though, unlike *Scouting* it does not include any practical information whatsoever, but is instead comprised of various speeches by Robert Mugabe (many of them commemoration speeches for the ‘fallen heroes of Zimbabwe’); reflections on Zimbabwean history; and a few tables of statistics meant to indicate the successes of the party after liberation in 1980. The book does not, then, overtly address itself to a young audience in the ways that *Scouting* does at all. And yet, as the ‘training manual’ for the Zimbabwean National Youth Service, which recruits members between the ages of 10 and 30 (SPT 14), its audience is indeed this rather widely defined ‘youth’.

The ‘National Youth Service’ training programme was initiated by Border Gezi, Minister of Youth, Gender and Employment (14 SPT), who released a

...document entitled “National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe”...in early October 2000. On the face of it, the proposal was a straightforward one, with the training allegedly intended to instill a “*sense of responsible citizenship among the youth*” and to prepare them for “the world and for work in their country”. (op cit. *The Herald*, Harare, 13 October 2000: “National service for all youths proposed” (14 SPT; emphasis mine)

The National Youth Service was presented, in the first instance as, to paraphrase B-P’s subtitle, nothing more than ‘an instruction in good citizenship’. As a Solidarity Peace Trust report elaborates, the ‘...proposal goes on to promote what appears to be a constructive syllabus for the training, including such objectives as to:

- Integrate youth issues into all government policies
- Provide opportunities for youth employment and participation in development
- Develop vocational skills
- Reduce teenage pregnancies
- Reduce spread of HIV/Aids
- Reduce alcohol and substance abuse
- Promote gender equality and equity
- Promote environmental education. (SPT 14)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> (SPT report, fnote 12, p14A document on national service was produced by Brigadier Agrippa Mutambara of the then Ministry of Political Affairs in 1992 which is not dissimilar to Gezi’s document: ZANU-PF has always been favourably disposed towards “youth training”, and created ZANU-PF youth brigades in the 1980s who campaigned violently on their behalf in the election of 1985. See *Breaking the Silence, building True Peace: a report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980-1988, CCJP and LRF, 1997*, for details on the 1980s youth brigades).

This list of objectives might be seen as loosely reminiscent of the early Scout Movement's concerns with the policing of boys' bodies (specifically in terms of sex and substance use<sup>11</sup>); its bucolic focus on nature; its aims to develop skills that would improve the possibility of employability;<sup>12</sup> and its evocation of a chivalric code of 'honouring women'.

These are self-evident justifications for a youth movement, yet it is worth noting that in reiterating such obvious justifications, Gezi might be seen to represent Zimbabwean youth, in this broad sweep of ages between 10 and 30, in ways that align with western ideals and ideas of the category of youth: that is, the youth as a sector of a population that is particularly vulnerable and in greater need of state protection and guidance than their adult counterparts. Yet, the disconnect between such a conception of youth and the *de facto* context of contemporary Zimbabwe is stark. The very idea of 'youth' in a country where (at the time the youth camps were established) had almost one million AIDS orphans (of a population of 12 Million), resulting in child headed households on a vast scale, is absurd. Teenage pregnancy, too, seems a bizarrely misplaced concept in a country where the average life expectancy is 37 for men and 34 for women (2006) and where the average age is 18.

More to my point, in reality the idea of childhood/youth played no role in the imagining or implementation of this youth training (which was instituted in 2000 as voluntary; became a matter of coercion in 2002 when one couldn't get a school leaving certificate without having completed 'Youth Service'; and became compulsory in 2004, at which point the National Youth Service was being referred to as the Youth Militia). As the Solidarity Peace Trust report informs us:

'In terms of international law, to train anyone militarily under the age of 18 years, is to create a child soldier. Government policy has on several occasions indicated the catchment for militia training as being those between 10 and 30 years old. While an overall record of the numbers and ages of youth trained is not publicly available, *ad hoc* information confirms that children as young as 11 years of age have been through the militia training'. (SPT 11)

Yet, in its first phase of implementation, 'ZANU reiterated that the training [was] not primarily a military one, in spite of overwhelming hard evidence to the contrary (SPT 15).<sup>13</sup> Why, then, this half-hearted attempt to present publically the idea of militia training *as* youth training? It seems to me that this may constitute a somewhat thin reading, on ZANU(PF)'s behalf, of the historical texts of youth movements such as the scouts. Which is to say, instead of seeing the ways that these youth movements were themselves forged in the smithy of imperial discourses and logics, the postcolonial recitation of

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 'Continence' on self-abuse (351-2); and B-P's anxieties about the 'excesses of smoking' (Boehmer xx); note, too, the scout's pledge not to smoke.

<sup>12</sup> note BEE story p

<sup>13</sup> 'Furthermore, in contradiction of claims that the training would not aim at imparting military skills, military drills including weapons training are shown to have been major elements of youth training since the first youth intakes during 2001. The government itself has finally in July 2003, acknowledged its hitherto denied policy of weapons training for all trainees in the compulsory service, with the national army announcing itself as a concerned party in the training. The Minister of Defence has announced that youth service should be compulsory, should involve weapons training, and that all youth should form a reserve force to defend their nation, falling under military command' (SPT10)

those values takes such movements at their word: they are seen as simply instructing boys towards good citizenship.

Yet, the debate about the militarization of the boy Scouts tells, of course, a much richer and more textured imperial story. Historians, such as John Springhall and Sidney Hynes have argued that ‘When Baden-Powell organized his Scout movement he did so with one primary motive – to prepare the next generation of British soldiers for war and the defence of Empire’ (Springhall 935; and in Warren 376). Other critics resist such claims, arguing that for B-P ‘scout training would make better Territorials and better citizens than any drill-based cadet training as advocated by the National Service League’ (Warren 387-8).<sup>14</sup> Yet, even if we take into account B-P’s (not unambivalent)<sup>15</sup> support of the National Service League’s rifle training for boys and its insistence that ‘all boys should be able to shoot’ (Warren 385), and the boy scouts formulation around a popular militarism of the time (See John Springhall, Anne Summers, Warren), the Scout Movement and the Zimbabwean youth militia are on completely opposite sides of a continuum of youth militarism. The former, global, is imagined around a specifically Edwardian notion of boyhood, with all its nostalgia for the upper-class Victorian nursery, and public school values, in place (Boehmer xxix), while the latter, national<sup>16</sup> and in the service of a virulent nationalism, has a clear political objective; is<sup>17</sup> aimed at the poor (it has been noted that many children joined, before any talk of the service being compulsory,<sup>18</sup> because they could get a meal); gives children real, militaristic power, which they use with impunity (see SPT 11); and leaves absolutely no room for the idealising of childhood. Children aged 11 with weapons is a far cry from the Edwardian nursery with its idealising tales of childhood, such as *Peter Pan*, which as Elleke Boehmer points out, influenced B-P so greatly (xxx). We are not in the realm of make-believe (B-P 312).

The stark discrepancy between how the Zimbabwean youth training was represented publically (as anodyne vocational and moral training for young people) and the violent realities of the training

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<sup>14</sup> The National Service League demanded ‘conscription and compulsory military and physical training for the young’ (Warren 379)

<sup>15</sup> See Pryke, ‘Precisely because B-P thought the war was about the struggle against militarism, he vehemently resisted attempts to merge the Boy Scouts into a national youth organisation under the control of the War Office or increase the amount of drill in Boy Scout activities’ (314).

<sup>16</sup> ‘During the last few months of 2001, youth militia training intensified throughout the nation, and was by January 2002 widespread in all provinces. By the end of 2002, it is estimated that around 9,000 boys and girls had passed through formal militia training in the five main camps, with an unclear further number, possibly 10-20,000, trained in less formal, often very primitive camps at district level. Before election 2002, militia had been deployed to 146 camps around the country, in close proximity to, or in some cases even sharing, venues for voting’ (SPT 16).

<sup>17</sup> The youth militia is still in operation today. Two months after creation of coalition government in 2009, 29 000 youth militia were still on government payroll (see ‘Zimbabwe: over 29 000 youth militia still being paid by the state’, SW Radia Africa, Lance GUma 03 April 2009: URL <http://palapye.wordpress.com/2009/04/05/zimbabwe-over-29-000-youth-militia-still-being-paid-by-the-state/>) And till present time (march 2010) reports of continued abuses by Youth Militia. Talk with Julius Malema to reform the militia (April 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Youth training was, from its inception, imagined as part of a national military conscription plan (see Lindgren and Ranger). In the first phase (2000-2003) participation was entirely voluntary, but by 2003 ‘...the youth militia training [was] referred to by government as compulsory. Furthermore, the government [then implemented] a policy that denies school leavers access to tertiary training facilities and civil service posts, including teaching and nursing, without proof of having completed the national service training.’ (SPT 10); and by July 2002 the ‘Minister of Higher Education and Technology, Samuel Mumbengegwi further announced that no students leaving high school would be given their “A” level or “O” level certificates until they had completed six months of national service’ (SPT 20).

camps bears out the point. Contrary to the stated aims, first hand witness accounts of the training camps indicate that rape and sexual violence, substance abuse, and military training are widespread in the camps, and that absolutely no vocational or environmental awareness training is provided. Indeed, where B-P's Scouting movement demonstrated is entanglement with imperial discourses of the time through providing a 'make-believe' of Empire; Mugabe's youth militia is, rather, real politics got up as make-believe.

This is not comparison, then, but discursive entanglement. In my longer paper I trace this entanglement by first analysing the anxieties about youth mobilization and 'restlessness' in the immediate political, economic and social contexts in which both texts are produced. I then go on to discuss the invention of tradition in both books through two central and entangled tropes: 'the young knights of Empire', in B-P's case and 'the sons of the soil' in Mugabe's. The analysis also considers the ways in which the 'founders', B-P and Mugabe respectively, are woven into these invented traditions. And, finally, considers the stylistic entanglements of the bucolic tradition with the logic of empire.

In my presentation, I will briefly address the two tropes of 'the young knights of empire' and 'the sons of the soil', so as to provide an example of my contrapuntal method of analysis.

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### **Skirting Hybridity: Translating Racial Anarchy in Richard Marsh's *The Surprising Husband***

“You are a freak – a sport – a white nigger. You haven't always been white; it does not follow that you will always stay white.”

*The Surprising Husband*

During the 1980s, what Hobsbaum refers to as the Age of Empire was closely scrutinized by a number of influential texts including, but certainly not limited to, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979), John MacKenzie's *Propaganda and Empire* (1984), Pick's *Faces of Degeneration* (1989) and Hobsbaum's own *Age of Empire* (1987). This scrutiny included the function of British imperialism as practice and ideology and also closely studied the related medical and (pseudo) scientific discourses that supported the imperial project, such as eugenics and other racist medical and sociological systems. While these texts made crucial contributions to the field, they rarely complicated the notion of Englishness as such, but produced it as a fairly homogeneous entity. Unfortunately, the categorization of British (white/colonizer) and Oriental (black/(subject) risks inscribing the very differences it seeks to interrogate, as argued by Homi Bhaba. A new series of texts published during the 1990s attempted to break up this coloniser/colonised binary by complicating the notion of Englishness. In particular, Paul Gilroy, Mary Louise Pratt, Elaine Showalter and R. C. J. Young have argued that Englishness is an essentially unstable category; the result of a continuous, transcultural process that hybridized (and hybridizes) British culture. In other words, what the British typically located as the racial and sexual Other of Englishness repeatedly enters this category throughout the Victorian period.

To position Englishness as a hybrid concept is undoubtedly extremely useful both when trying to understand the Victorian period and when attempting to comprehend the state of Britain today. However, to simply acknowledge Englishness as a hybrid culture risks diverting our attention away from the fact that this culture was generally perceived as inherently stable by those who embraced it. Young is no doubt correct when he argues that Englishness was “fraught with difference”, but the turn-of-the-century author who was informed, and helped produce, Englishness often seems highly reluctant to embrace this difference even when being overtly concerned with it.

Arguably, the two most important notions that informed the concept of Englishness were race and gender. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, as Elaine Showalter argues in *Sexual Anarchy*, these concepts begin to break down. This collapse, which produced new hybrid understanding of both race and gender, can be traced in the literature of the period, some of which celebrated this change and some of which described it as a catastrophe. When trying to understand how systematic racism and sexism became a part of the discourse on Englishness, popular literature is often studied. Daniel Pick's study *Faces of Degeneration* (1989) is only one of many that demonstrate how texts such as Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), several of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes's stories and Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) make use of the theories and anxieties brought forward by Lombroso, Nordau



and Galton (see also Brantlinger, Hurley, Halberstam, Trotter, Spencer). Certainly, much popular literature in general, and the crime and gothic novels in particular, seems to relish in depicting the cultural Other (the Oriental) or the criminal as a degenerate monster.

However, a more thorough scrutiny of popular literature suggests that popular writers also debated and complicated racist discourses. In particular, the fiction of Richard Marsh often disturbs the very discourses it relies on. While *The Beetle* (1897) has been read by Julian Wolfrey's as deeply informed by, and seemingly utterly uncritical of, Lombroso's contentions, a closer look at other Marsh novels suggests that they not only openly discuss the discourse of degeneration and miscegenation, but that they speak in several conflicting voices that simultaneously seem to confirm and collapse this discourse. Recent scholarship on Marsh also argues that Marsh's fiction cannot simply be read as automatically producing anxieties related to sex and gender. This present paper argues that Marsh's texts permit a plethora of dissonant voices to surface. These subaltern voices, vying for space with much more conservative statements, simultaneously confirm and complicate the notion of Englishness. By subaltern here I mean any subject that is located socially and historically outside the hegemonic power structure of late-Victorian and Edwardian society, including the New Woman, the Oriental and the African (American).

In other words, the present paper seeks to demonstrate how Marsh's fiction resonates with several concurrent yet conflicting voices. This is done through a reading of one of his most complex novels, the gothic melodrama *The Surprising Husband*. The paper thus repositions Marsh in relationship to other (popular) writers, but the main concern is that popular turn-of-the-century literature negotiated ideological pressures not always by dismissing all possible counter discourses, as *Dracula* seems to do, nor by making room for the Other by hybridizing the text. Instead, I argue, literature from the era sometimes negotiated the possibility of counter discourse through fundamentally heterogeneous texts where English and subaltern voices speak simultaneously. In this way, Marsh's text ultimately maps the rifts that occurred in English society rather than the hybrid states that these rifts eventually produced.

Marsh's *The Surprising Husband* exemplifies this through a strikingly open discussion of late nineteenth-century racism, the atavistic body and the need to limit black agency in post-slavery Europe. Like several of Marsh's novels, it moves effortlessly between genres. Some chapters are best characterized as romantic melodrama, others as domestic fiction or crime fiction. Importantly, it is informed by multiple discourses, genre conventions and texts as well as by Marsh's own style and experiences.

The protagonist of the novel is a likeable, racial impostor by the name of Mr George Vanderhorn. In the opening chapter of the novel, he and his young wife Evelyn Vanderhorn find themselves in the French Village Antrain, in the sprawling, somewhat seedy and overtly gothic hotel La Boule d'Or. The trip, undertaken by car, has brought on premature labour in Evelyn, and while she gives birth to the baby in an upstairs attic, George reads a much belated letter from his father revealing, to his great surprise and consternation, that George was born black. George finds this supposition difficult to credit "Certainly he was as white as any native-born Englishman" (11). However, his father explains that while George's mother and grandmother were both white, his great grandmother had evidently been "the plaything" of a white slave master and produced a white child. In addition to this, his great grandmother was a

practitioner of (clearly criminal) Voodoo rites and her atavistic countenance is described as “more apelike than any ape’s I ever saw” (13).

George’s remarkable and indisputable whiteness is explained as a gradual transformation, brought on by his white heritage in connection with his confrontation with English society: “I sent you to England ... as you grew, your appearance changed. You grew whiter and whiter, until, by the time you were ten, you were so pale that the English, who know nothing about these things, took you for a true white. You went to Harrow; then to Oxford: doing well at both places” (13-14). However, George’s father warns him that this remarkable racial passing may not last:

You are a freak – a sport – a white nigger. You haven’t always been white; it does not follow that you will always stay white ... When I first saw your grandmother she was a white woman. When I saw her again, when you were ten years old, and had turned white, she, although still white, was perceptibly darker; and had developed unmistakable negro characteristics... Then years later she made a bee-line to the States of Alabama – to the black scum; her relatives. Back called unto black. When I last heard of her she had become an obeah women, like her mother; skilled in ju-ju; in voodoo; all the other pretty things. It is scientifically possible, to put it softly, that you yourself will become an obeah man before you die.” (16)

The possibility that George may shed his civilised, white veneer is perhaps best understood as yet another reference to degeneration. Somehow, George has “evolved” into a white Englishman in Britain. However, because of his unstable racial background, his father assumes the process to be highly reversible.

George must now try to negotiate his present, his future and his own inner turmoil. This is an especially difficult process for George; the sudden transformation of George into a nominally black man is deeply ironic since George has always been a convinced and vocal racist, having argued in front of his friends and in public “that a period has come in the world’s history in which the white man’s hand is against all other men that he has noting in common with any other men; and that, in the struggle for existence, which is coming closer and closer, he will have to keep all other men off him with some kind of a whip, which will cut them into little pieces” (15-16). Not surprisingly, George is now at a loss: “He had always regarded coloured people with horror and loathing; and – he was one of them” (44).

Thus, the dominant and racist discourse that informed much of imperial Britain seems to collapse. If the perfectly white and fair, Oxford educated, politically successful, immensely wealthy gentleman and perfectly racist George Vanderhorn has black ancestry, the notions of black and white appear to lose their function as medical, social and historical categories. However, before either George or the reader is given time to contemplate the sudden development, Monsieur Pompon enters the scene and reinstates the racist paradigm. Monsieur Pompon is an extremely large, “monstrous negro, fantastically attired in odd and ends of what, apparently, had once been a uniform” (39). Evidently a Voodoo practitioner like George’s relatives in the South, Pompon first engineers a car crash where the doctor who delivered the baby dies, and then proceeds, in a supremely gothic dream sequence, to steal and murder George’s baby: “He [Pompon] went on, swinging the child by the one leg as he walked; its

screams seemed to grow more and more intense, he apparently unconscious that it was emitting a sound; on and on he went. . . He took the child in both hands, and he twisted its neck; with such violence that its head came right away from its body” (64-65).<sup>19</sup>

While George’s blackness is unapparent, Pompon’s African heritage defines his entire personality. In describing Pompon, Marsh obviously draws from a vast repository of notions on the Black European. This repository has been explored extensively by Paul Gilroy, Cora Kaplan and Marcus Wood. Gilroy has importantly suggested that the meeting between African cultures, African American culture and British culture in various forms should be understood as a transcultural process where white as well as black identities undergo repeated change. George’s nominal blackness is interesting from this perspective and seems to confirm the possibility of a form of transcultural subjectivity. However, the introduction of Pompon in the novel instead appears to reinstate absolute cultural and racial categories. This is partly accomplished through the introduction of Pompon’s monstrous black body, but also by making Pompon a practitioner of Voodoo.

In this way, *The Surprising Husband* inscribes racism and eugenic belief into the text only to defer them and defer them only to reinstate them, creating a pattern that is halted only by the ending of the novel. Thus, what may be described as subaltern voices suspend the flow of the discursive current of the novel. These voices are countermanded by this current almost as soon as they are voiced, but they still insist on being heard, and this insistence is at the same time a claim for agency, even a form of agency in itself. However, the result is not a hybrid or transcultural voice that manages to reconcile two conflicting positions, but rather a number of concurrent voices that speak simultaneously and outline multiple, sometimes wildly diverging, discourses and positions.

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<sup>19</sup> This is arguably one of the most horrific scenes of any late-Victorian gothic novel. Probably, it could be stomached by its readers only because it is told through what the narrator assumes is a dream but also because the child is black, a fact that fortifies the (racist) reader against the horror described.

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### **The Limits of Transculturation in John Sayles' *Lone Star***

I would like to begin this paper with a passage from Jeff Lewis's article, "From Culturalism to Transculturalism," both because it speaks with clarity on what is at stake when we talk of transcultural/ity/ism/tion (the nuances signaled by suffixes I will not comment on here), and because John Sayles' 1996 film *Lone Star* interestingly dialogues with many of the elements Lewis identifies. "Transculturalism is distinguished in particular," Lewis says,

by its emphasis on the problematics of contemporary culture, most particularly in terms of relationships, meaning-making, and power formation. However, transculturalism is as interested in dissonance, tension, and instability as it is with the stabilizing effects of social conjunction, communalism, and organization. It seeks to illuminate the various gradients of culture and the ways in which social groups "create" and "distribute" their meanings. Equally, though, transculturalism seeks to illuminate the ways in which social groups interact and experience tension. It is interested in the destabilizing effects of non-meaning or meaning atrophy.<sup>1</sup>

In this view convergences and confluences of differently originated cultural and epistemological routes do not necessarily bring into being new, cultural vectors or phenomena, but, as importantly, serve to underline new as well as already existing tensions, spatially and temporally. Lewis' concept of "meaning atrophy" (withering, degeneration) holds special interest in the following, for, as I hope to show, *Lone Star* offers compelling commentaries on this point. The film suggests the endurance of unbroken refractions of identifications, affirming grids of expectations and anticipations that are deeply entangled in the past as this continues to define the present. The short analysis here will explore one scene in particular as it reads in relation to "Words and Worlds: Transculturalism, Translation, Identity," and the way meanings are "created" and "distributed."

For those unacquainted with *Lone Star*,<sup>2</sup> a brief recapitulation of the main story line may be in order: After years away, the primary protagonist Sam Deeds has returned to his hometown Frontera, Texas, in order to succeed his recently deceased father, the legendary Buddy Deeds, as town sheriff. The movie opens with two men from the nearby military post spending their day off on an abandoned shooting range, where they find a skeleton. This leads to a murder investigation lead by Sam, and the unraveling of the murder is also the unraveling of multiple, intertwined narratives, of and between individuals, ethnic groups, countries, and, finally, histories and memories. The story is told through the various view points of different characters: Buddy's loyal friends Mayor Hollis, Otis or "Big O," the owner of the only black bar in Frontera, nicknamed the "Mayor of Darktown," the Kickapoo Indian selling souvenirs on off-beat roads, Sam's high school sweetheart from days past, Pilar, to mention some. Gradually the pieces come together, and the picture that crystallizes will change Sam's perception of his own as well as his community's past and present.

In theme and structure the narrative lends itself well to a reading according to the framework of the transcultural: unapologetically, it offers up the chronicle of a powerful contact zone where historically and culturally Spanish, Mexican, Anglo-American, Mexican-American, Native American, and African American histories and cultures meet and, with varying intensity, engage. As such the fictitious Frontera, which emulates the reality of any number of real places along the US-Mexican border, and elsewhere for that matter, serves as a case study for just how what Jim Clifford refers to as the “mix of human times we call history” plays out across temporal divides and spaces.<sup>3</sup> It also illustrates with great erudition Pratt's observation in her “Contact Zone” essay, that,

Autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression - these are some of the literate arts of the contact zone. Miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning - these are some of the perils of writing in the contact zone.<sup>4</sup>

Pratt reminds us of the response of withdrawal which the contact zone also elicits, for the real world time and again reminds us that the safety and urgency of parameters rooted in longstanding ideas of heritage and history are strong - and enduring. *Lone Star*'s fiction balances these impulses, giving due notice to the inevitable bilingualism, the vernacular, and mediation, but at the same time insisting on what Pratt calls “absolute heterogeneity of meaning,” what Lewis refers to as “meaning anthropology.” For instance, Frontera local politics displays amicable, if somewhat corrupt collaborations between various actors of the conglomerate, but these must contend with legacies of past local, national, and international treaties and transgressions. Similarly, in a high school PTA meeting, opinions on what part of Texas history to teach and not teach is an uncomfortable reminder of the actual debates raging in many a school house around the Southwest, where “meanings” and “miscomprehension” make their distressing impact.

Central to the film's story is Sam's reconnecting with Pilar, herself now a high school teacher. Among the many taxing revelations in the film is the disclosure that comes well after they have started a romantic relationship, namely that both Sam and Pilar are Buddy Deed's children by different mothers. The last scene in the movie shows Sam and Pilar in the abandoned Drive-In theatre, and Sam telling Pilar the secret nature of their relation:

PILAR: They can't pull this on me. It isn't fair - I don't believe this-“

SAM: He [Buddy] paid the hospital bill when you were born. Your mom always calls you “our beautiful daughter” in the letters she wrote to him.

Pilar's shock and silence follow, after which the two ask each other and themselves what the next step should be, Pilar insistently saying that she cannot have any more children, “if that's what the rule is about.” The following dialogue ensues, concluding the film:

PILAR: We start from scratch –

SAM: Yeah –

PILAR: Everything that went before, all that stuff, that history - the hell with it, right?

Pilar takes Sam's hand, kisses him-

PILAR: Forget the Alamo.

WIDE SHOT, DRIVE-IN

Sam and Pilar sit by each other holding hands, looking at the empty screen -

The ending suggests that the romance will continue despite the blood relation, with Pilar's "Forget the Alamo" and the blank screen accompanied by Patsy Montana's 1935 hit "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart" as dramaturgical backdrop. To understand how this commentary in relation to contact zones and transculturation signifies, it may be helpful to consult Sarah Dillon's discussion of the palimpsest and the palimpsestuous. Hers is a complex argument, and I can here only do it minimal justice: While even the simplest and most innocent palimpsest implies the domination and privileging of new inscription over old, there is at the same time the following paradox: palimpsesting "preserved [ancient texts] for posterity."<sup>5</sup> Dillon refers to these invisibly, present layers in the palimpsest as "ghostly traces," a metaphor for the relationality between past and present utterances, the nature of which is not always predictable. Thus, in a deepening of the already rich trope of the palimpsest, she introduces the palimpsestuous, "the type of relationality reified in the palimpsest," highlighting "the structure that one is presented with as the result of that process [of layering], and the subsequent reappearance of the underlying script."<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere Dillon notes that a "palimpsestuous reading is an inventive process of creating relations where there may, or should, be none; hence the appropriateness of its epithet's phonetic similarity to the incestuous."<sup>7</sup>

The last scene in *Lone Star* makes its impact in its reference to precisely "layering" "reappearance," and the illicit. We can begin with Pilar's "Forget the Alamo:" This is a complete reversal of one the most persistent tropes in Texan and American history, expressed in the oft-repeated slogan: "Remember the Alamo!" The battle between Texan and Mexican troops at the Alamo Mission in February of 1836 would in the U.S. come to symbolize the struggle for Texan independence, and the sacrifice given for the cause of freedom. The call to forget this event and, as Pilar says, "all that history" that would strain Mexican and Texan/American relations repeats the blank screen's signal of wiped out endings and new beginnings, indeed, speaking to David Attwell's coinage of transculturation as "reconstruction on entirely new terms." To "forget the Alamo" is thus on a more concrete level also directed at the prejudice overwriting and silencing the original relation between Buddy and Pilar's Mexican mother Mercedes: the illicit and unintended relationality between offspring is generated by a layer in this cultural palimpsest that in its time had to be erased. So, while the scene does hint toward a future of new chances, of new kinds of relations unhampered by the parameters of "miscomprehensions, "emphasizing instead mediation," it is the palimpsestuous that surfaces, an unintended relationality between past and present utterances that was not supposed to be. The empty screen and the dry brush land it sits in underscore this, and more, they rehearse the idea of barrenness. *Lone Star's* representation of the borderland-as-contact zone, and the worlds and translated identities it contains consequently motions toward a rather dark current, a hint that new beginnings are devoid of potential, of future.

The scene and the difficult instantiation of transculturation it presents moreover analogizes the many other stories *Lone Star* hosts, all in some way or other trapped in and overlaid by various, local taboos, keeping black from white, Mexican from Anglo, and Native American from all of the above. The attempts at transcending, at crossing, literally as well as figuratively, are shown again and again as fraught attempts, articulated in a key scene midway through the film when Sam goes across the border to interview Chucho, a witness to the murder he investigates:

CHUCHO: You the sheriff of Rio County, right? Un jefe muy respetado. Step over this line.

Sam obliges -

CHUCHO: Ay, que milagro! You're not the Sheriff of nothing anymore - just some tejano with a lot of questions I don't have to answer.

Sam smiles, plays with the line with his toe -

CHUCHO: Bird flying south-you think he sees that line? Rattlesnake, javelin -whatever you got - halfway across that line they don't start thinking different. So why should a man?

The scene relates directly to the intertwined history of the US-Mexico Borderland, in which the line Chucho talks about for a long time remained a non-consequential note in governmental papers only. Its reinforcement in everyday politics and practices, and with it the corralling of identities linked by one history into discreet spatial configurations is consequently a relatively recent layer in this particular cultural palimpsest. The processes of transculturation that the borderland as contact zone have generated may consequently be approached on two different levels, one temporal and one spatial. In the latter case we can talk about reconstructions on new terms, where Pratt's arts of the contact zone flourish. On the other hand, however, temporally circumscribed parameters of non-comprehension and residues of memories and heritages underlying this stubbornly persist. As with so many other contact zones, therefore, the Borderland and the fictitious Frontera in *Lone Star* cannot simply be reduced to a spatially representative space of variously entangled cultural and historical currents; these are always subject to the retracting and intransigent counter-currents of temporally defined boundaries

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### **Transculturalism and National Identity: The Latvian Case**

In my paper I will discuss the literary scene in Latvia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the perspective of postcolonial theory.

I will focus on works written by Rūdolf Blaumanis (1863–1908), one of the leading Latvian writers of the period. Blaumanis belongs to both Latvian and German culture, the latter still dominant in Latvia throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, the emerging Latvian literature was an integral part of the larger movement of national awakening manifested in the rising self-awareness of the so-called nondominant ethnic group. According to Miroslav Hroch, sufficient vertical mobility within such a group, presupposing that a substantial part of the emerging nation does not become assimilated into the dominant cultural patterns, is one of the preconditions of the successful identity formation.

For Blaumanis, to become an author writing in Latvian was a personal and remarkably difficult choice as such. He was educated in German, and his early acquaintances were almost exclusively Germans too. Among those close to him we find figures like the Lutheran pastor of his native parish Ērgļi, the editor of the German newspaper *Zeitung für Stadt und Land* published in Riga, who employed Blaumanis as a theatre and literary critic as well as published his first story, and two Baltic German writers Eugene von Bergmann and Viktor von Andrejanoff, his friends and mentors. Later he definitively named both of the authors as belonging to the most talented writers of the region:

*Für mich existieren nur 3 baltische lebende Poeten: Pantenius (unser Gotfr. Keller, nicht ganz aber doch...), Andrejanoff (unser Byron, - deckt sich vollständig), Sie (mehr Eichendorff).* (Letter to Bergmann, June 7, 1895)

It is thus understandable that Blaumanis's early works were conceived and written in German; and it took four years after his first publication in 1882 for him to switch to the Latvian language. His experience allowed him to develop a reasonably critical attitude concerning topical issues dealt with on both sides of the cultural divide, and even if his own later literary works were written in Latvian, still, he depended a lot upon German examples as well as kept a critical eye on the provinciality of Latvian literature. His diary entries, however, remained partly in German.

All this confirms that in terms of necessity of self-identification of Latvian culture at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Blaumanis is a case in point.

My talk will outline some crucial aspects in this move towards self-identification while dealing with recurrent motifs in Blaumanis's early works. The main among those is the motif of the prodigal son which I interpret as the writer's attempt of transposing his personal dilemma into behavioural patterns of his fictional characters. I draw here to a considerable extent on the research carried out by Michael Fried, in particular his analysis of art and embodiment in the creative work of such 19<sup>th</sup> century painters as Gustave Courbet and Adolph Menzel. I argue that what Fried sees mostly as a search for new



aesthetic approaches in visual art, i.e. attempts to put the painter into painting, or at least to preserve a partial perspective of an artist at work on the finished canvas, in the context of literary creation this search can also be discussed as a semi-conscious attempt of the author to come to terms not only with his art but also with his own personal and social identity.

Another, related to the previous, aspect of Blaumanis's writing will be outlined with the focus upon the use of space in his fiction. In her analysis of Estonian literature Liina Lukas has shown that at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the national and Baltic German literatures generally focus upon different locations – peasant house and manor respectively. However, there are transitional cases. For example, the setting of several of Blaumanis's works is a manor seen not from a landlord's perspective but rather that of his servants. These cases provide a good opportunity to demonstrate transculturalism and hybridity in action, and specifically they reveal the transformation of the initially dominant motif of the prodigal son. I will also link these texts to the works of arguably the most important of Blaumanis's Baltic German contemporaries Eduard von Keyserling (1855–1918).

I will attempt to show that even when authors with different backgrounds portray similar events, they do it from different points of view. The relation between Blaumanis and Baltic German literature remains uptight throughout. While generally seeing German authors as his main sources of inspiration (he explicitly mentions Goethe, Schiller, Rosegger as important influences, and he was himself called a local Rosegger by his German acquaintances), on the whole, Blaumanis remained critical towards Baltic German authors and considered their work provincial and rootless. This gives us ground to argue that he consciously remained outside Baltic German literature with its predominant topic of nostalgia and its urge to keep the status quo.

Still, the Baltic authors of different backgrounds reacted to the same processes, revealing to the reader the range of psychological expression of the individual fated to experience changing times and social upheaval; the similarity allows us to recognize common themes in the literary development of the region.

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### **Relating the Concept of *Transculturation* to Maxine Hong Kingston's Novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book***

Maxine Hong Kingston published her novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* in 1987 and takes us into the mind of a troubled American youngster (or hippie, rather) with Chinese heritage. In this paper I aim to provide a discussion of the novel's presentation of its agenda; namely its concern with immigration and its effects on people's lives and identities, and how these concerns can be understood through the concept of transculturation as coined by Fernando Ortiz in 1940.

*Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* presents us with a protagonist whose name is Wittman Ah Sing, named after the American poet Walt Whitman. Already here we see a merging of two different cultures; between American and Chinese. This merging is interesting, though, as the tension between what is the core of American culture versus what is the core of Chinese culture is still strong after five generations of Wittmans having lived in America. This, I believe, indicates how it does not matter how long Wittman's family has had roots in a country, but how society shifts in its ideas on hybridity, nationality, identity and ethnicity, in turn affecting different generations of immigrant descendants in different ways. Surely, the time of Walt Whitman saw a wholly different society about to take shape than what the 1960s, a hundred years later, brought.

*Tripmaster Monkey* reflects contemporary concerns of the 1960s and challenges dominant views on identity and perceptions of identity. This is particularly evident in the last part of the novel when Wittman Ah Sing performs his monologue to his audience and claims his right to his own agency; through which he can call himself whatever he likes, not having to consider everyone else's labeling of him. This is but one example of how the novel explicates issues around identity, ethnicity and nationality, which can be considered through the concept of transculturation; a phenomenon describing how identities are forever changed when different cultures meet and merge, beyond that of simply letting go of one or just absorbing another culture. This phenomenon has its background in Fernando Ortiz's study of the negative impacts on Cuban culture from Spanish colonialism.

Literary transculturation, the way I understand it, deals with ethnicity and identity in a generic way, in which a text's literary form and genre reflect its attitudes towards these issues. A mixing of genres may be one way of explicating ideas around boundaries being trespassed, which in turn reflect transcended boundaries.

The text is also performative. Firstly, it performs in the voice and spirit of Walt Whitman; "Here we are, Walt Whitman's 'classless society' of 'everyone who could read or be read to.'" (Kingston, 9) Thus, it performs the thoughts and ideas of a different kind of American, an American of the 1960s, and a different version of the poet Whitman. However, as much as Wittman Ah Sing struggles to have an American voice, Kingston also challenges, through Wittman's identity struggle, what it means to be American, and what exactly it is that one strives for in wanting to achieve an American identity. In claiming that they are "Whitman's 'classless society'", Wittman attempts to see the society that

Whitman saw in his time; an American society in which each individual soul ought to be content in learning from and with his/her surroundings. Thus, in familiarizing oneself with one's surroundings, one may identify oneself with it, and so Whitman, identified himself as *American*, America being his surroundings, his nation. When we read that Wittman Ah Sing is a "Fifth-generation native Californian" who has nothing to do with "F.O.B émigrés" and that "His province is America. America, his province" (41), we understand that it is America as a nation that this, other Wittman seeks to define himself by, not his Chinese looks and background.

Further, Kingston constantly revokes old and contemporary ideas by "Western" authors and philosophers. We are perpetually reminded of the exclusiveness of "Western" ideas to people like Wittman Ah Sing, who has an "Eastern" heritage. We are left as confused about what is American as Wittman Ah Sing is about his identity. This happens through Kingston's questioning of America as a "Western" nation, all exclusive to "Western" ideas. By portraying Wittman as someone who sees himself as a 1960's version of Walt Whitman she effectively and ironically questions what is American by using American literary tradition and simultaneously creating a *Chinese monkey* turning American towards the end.

However, the layers of *Tripmaster Monkey* are not as simple as only uncovering the truth behind false representation of Chinese people in America, whether in media or literature and arts. Wittman's "marriage" to an American white girl stands as a symbol of that: "She's not Chinese, I'll admit, but those girls are all out with white guys. What am I to do, huh? I don't want a Hong Kong wife marrying me for a green card." (336) In revealing these thoughts to his audience, Wittman Ah Sing does something that is very common in identifying groups after their national identities, namely to set them up against each other and define the one according to what the other is *not*: he defines her as *not* Chinese, *not* some *Hong Kong* wife, she is American because she is *not* Chinese by looks and behavior. But then what is American?

Wittman Ah Sing is constantly haunted by his Chinese roots. We read about his encounters with the F.O.Bs; the Fresh Off the Boats, or as it says in the novel: "Immigrants Fresh Off the Boats out in public." (5) Even though there is no colonial history between China and America, I believe that Matthew Toups in his short analysis of Derek Walcott's poem "A Far Cry from Africa" describes an aspect of the process of transculturation which sheds light on parts of what is going on with Wittman in *Tripmaster Monkey*. Toups claims that:

In essence, "colonial mimicry" is the process by which a subjugated people are driven to reproduce the characteristics and ideals of a dominant culture in a way that closely resembles the true dominant culture; hence, it is a form of transculturation. (Toups, 2003)

In disclaiming any recognition between himself and these new immigrants, Wittman struggles to keep as close to the all-American culture as possible. In doing so he maintains an ironic distance to all things Chinese: "He said 'Fleishhacker Zoo' to himself in Chinatown language, just to keep a hand in, so to speak, to remember and so to keep awhile longer words spoken by *the people of his brief and dying culture*." (Kingston, 6, my emphasis) It is by drawing a line between *immigrant* and *American* that

Wittman finds himself. He is on the other side of the immigrant reality that many of the Chinese people in America live (also, it seems, physically: “He had been tripping out on the wrong side of the street. ... What had he to do with foreigners?” (41)). Wittman sees his culture as a dying one because there is a need to remind oneself of its language time and again, and there is a need to cling onto what’s left of it somehow, without realizing that this is a process of transculturation that is taking place. While in China, Chinese culture is not constantly subjugated to or confronted by a dominant one, but in America, Chinese culture is perpetually changing as it confronts a wholly different set of values, traditions and so on. And it is in the midst of it all, that we witness a transcultural struggle, (rather than process), in Wittman, also well described in Matthew’s article as follows:

Although one's *perceived* identity may be defined by a particular society's standards, true identity can only be obtained through a *self-analysis*, such as the personal struggle characteristic of transculturation. In the intersection of two cultures, the process of transculturation defines one's identity. (Toups, 2003)

However, as much as I agree that self-analysis is very much part of finding one’s true identity, I would not want to take for granted that one inevitably experiences a process of transculturation in “the intersection of two cultures”. Or, in that case, I would rather talk of *different* processes of transculturation. For instance, there is an interesting lack of self-analysis/process of transculturation in other characters than Wittman, which surprises him. Consider this:

She brazened on. “You’ve got good eyelids, Wittman. He’s got a fold. It’s a common operation. It’s one of the more simple cosmetic surgical procedures.” She was looking to Wittman. Help. “*You* know,” she said, appealing to him, Be my ally. “Oh, *you* know. *You* know what I mean.” (Kingston, 107)

Her lack of understanding how she has let the dominant culture become her identity, (there seems to be an unawareness about her manner, not that there is anything wrong with wanting to look more like the *typical* American, whatever that is, but she does not realize that that is exactly what she is doing) indicates issues concerning mimicry (typically connected with colonial and postcolonial ideology) which in a sense is *her* process of transculturation. To modify Toups argument, then, one can say that “different processes of transculturation [...] define one’s identity”, rather than one. Homi Bhabha claims, in a chapter on colonial mimicry from his *The Location of Culture*, that: “The desire to emerge as ‘authentic’ through mimicry through a process of writing and repetition is the final irony of partial representation.” (Bhabha, 129) The nameless character’s wanting to reproduce (through a process of repetition) the looks that are standardized by dominant Western culture is her process of transculturation in the intersection of the two cultures that she exists in. However, it is precisely the kind of attitudes she has that become the background for our analysis of *Wittman’s* character and *his* process of transculturation in defining and understanding his identity, in the end, shedding light on what Toups

argued for. This is but one way in which the concept of transculturation can be related to Kingston's novel.

Finally, Kingston's narrative reflects the way she also situates the reader between two cultures, so that we as an audience can experience a process of transculturation in the sense that we along with him determine whether or not Wittman is American or Chinese or both. This is where language/literariness plays a significant role. It is one of the ways in which transculturation can be related to and is explicated in literature. Kingston switches between writing in streams of consciousness (inspired by Virginia Woolf), writing in poetry (inspired by Chinese sayings, and unknown authors (*The Journey to the West* as the main allusion to Chinese art) as well as Walt Whitman himself) and even including a play, which all represent different aspects of English and Chinese literature and art. The chapter called *A Pear Garden in the West* is a perfect example of just that.

Moreover, apart from the overt references to Whitman, there is something Whitmanesque about Wittman Ah Sing when he claims to the reader, after calling Nanci, that it's him, but "Not by my looks, and not by my race, nor by my deformities, I will yet identify myself." (Kingston, 274) Further, Kingston writes:

Nor were they here to feel sorry and give charity, which one human being had to give another anyway if he or she is to stay Chinese. They came because what Boleslavsky said is true: "Acting is the life of the human soul receiving its birth through art." Everyone really does want to get into the act. (276)

This, along with Kingston's rhetorical strategies throughout, makes *Tripmaster Monkey* a book that constantly questions what is American, what is the West, what is East. This is evident by her voicing of Walt Whitman through Wittman Ah Sing and intertextual relationships to other texts and art forms, in including American authors, poets, playwrights (all of which I consider to be the literary language of her book), thus claiming China as a window to and of the West (162). In stripping Chinese culture of all its exoticness, Kingston contains a space within Wittman that is neither Chinese nor American, because as much as he wants to be the new voice of Walt Whitman, the ultimate American, there is no such thing as the ultimate American. So, in the end, he "fails" to make everyone around him look past his Chinese looks, and all they do is celebrate his Chinese roots and he turns "into a pacifist" as she turns him into an American monkey: "Dear American monkey, don't be afraid. Here, let us tweak your ear, and kiss your other ear." (340) This is how the book indicates that it truly is the society's shifts in its ideas on hybridity, nationality, identity and ethnicity that we are dealing with, which in turn affect different generations of immigrant descendants in different ways, and in Wittman's case, in a way that is crucial to both his self-analysis *and* perceived identity.

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### **Transcultural Encounters in Utopian Spaces: James Baldwin, Paris, and Heterotopia**

Paris has traditionally been a popular place among American writers. Especially in the postwar period, the heterotopic cultural space of Paris also became increasingly important for many African American writers, who established it as what may be regarded as an imaginary construct, a utopian space. Following the lead of such African American literary figures as Richard Wright and Chester Himes, James Baldwin was one of the black writers who chose Paris in search of refuge from the “house of bondage,” the context of racism, homophobia, and McCarthyism of the mid-twentieth-century United States. This self-imposed state of exile provided Baldwin with a suitable critical distance in order to negotiate his complex identity as a black American with nonnormative sexuality. Paris as a complex, transcultural space, in which people with different cultural and national backgrounds and identities meet and interact, appears in many of Baldwin’s essays, such as “Encounter on the Seine: Black meets Brown,” “Equal in Paris,” and “The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American,” and in his fiction, particularly in the novels *Just above My Head* (1979), *Giovanni’s Room* (1955), and *Another Country* (1962). In this paper, I will read a passage in *Just above My Head* in order to analyze the utopian dimensions of the transcultural encounters in Paris.

In the African American context, the whole process of migrating to Paris carries important allegorical and symbolic connotations. Firstly, the transatlantic voyage from New York to Paris inevitably harks back to the involuntary Middle Passage of enslaved Africans to the New World as part of the transatlantic triangular trade and may be read according to what Fredric Jameson has defined as a symbolic resolution of a real social contradiction (see *The Political Unconscious* [1981]), that is, as an allegorical way of countering the history of slavery. Secondly, Paris is a complex cultural space in which people of various cultural and national backgrounds would meet and interact. These transcultural encounters take place in different heterotopic spaces, such as cafes and private bedrooms, where the social norms and categories of race and sexuality can be challenged and momentarily transcended. In the process, these mundane spaces are transformed into utopian enclaves, imaginary spaces, where, in Jameson’s words, “new wish images of the social can be elaborated and experimented on” (*Archaeologies of the Future* 9). All of this functions as a part of the larger project of what I have elsewhere called the impulse of *postcategorical utopia*, that is, Baldwin’s lifelong intellectual pursuit of a better way of being, a world in which issues of race, sexuality, gender, class, and nationality would lose their power as instruments of oppression. This transcendence of identity categories would inevitably involve processes of transculturation in which the exchange of ideas across the boundaries would lead to mutual understanding and cultural transformation. I will discuss these issues by using a passage in *Just above My Head* in which the African American protagonist, Arthur, a gospel singer, visits Paris and experiences the transcultural dimensions of the metropolis.

Arthur’s short, voluntary exile in Paris is characterized by a sense of freedom unlike anything he has experienced before. This is one of the crucial components of Paris as a place of refuge for African

Americans, as an opportunity to escape the context of racism and homophobia in the mid-twentieth-century United States. Arthur's stay in Paris may be divided into three main stages: the initial stage of being alone in a strange city, the second stage dominated by his same-sex relationship with Guy, a white Frenchman, and finally the short third stage which takes place in a jazz club. Each of these stages configures Arthur's exile in a different way: firstly, his slightly perplexing but liberating loneliness and isolation in Paris, secondly his complex but rewarding relationship with Guy, and thirdly the profoundly transcultural moment between Arthur and his audience in the jazz club. These stages are inextricably connected with certain spaces, both public and private, such as restaurants, clubs, and Guy's apartment, in which transcultural encounters occur.

In the first phase, Arthur is a complete stranger in Paris, without any acquaintances, without a shared language, without a shared sense of space. At this initial stage, the liberating effect of Paris depends on Arthur's incapability of understanding the people around him, which, given the fact that he has spend all his life in a social context largely governed by racist hostility, offers a momentary release for him: "And if he cannot speak, neither can others speak to him, and he cannot even eavesdrop. He has no way of understanding what they are saying, therefore, it does not matter what they are saying: in the resulting silence, he drops his guard. [...] In Paris, he is practically invisible—practically, free" (457).

The sense of freedom and safety which results from invisibility and from a failure to understand one's surroundings is not, however, enough, because it is necessarily deceptive and submissive. As the text maintains: "Arthur [...] tries to make something coherent and bearable out of all that he sees, and doesn't see. For that, he needs another: in order to see what he fears to see, he must, himself, be seen. He needs to give himself to someone who needs to give himself to Arthur" (459). Arthur cannot afford to remain in his cocoon of silence and invisibility; instead, he needs to reach out across the boundaries of the oppressive identity categories that he has sought to escape. The opportunity arrives in the form of Guy Lazar, a white, red-haired Frenchman, who comes to talk to Arthur in a restaurant, and this leads to the second stage of Arthur's exile in Paris. Guy leads Arthur to the almost empty dining room of a private club, where they sit and talk—Guy speaks fluent English—and a connection starts to form between them. This is where spatiality becomes an important issue: the club is a mundane place where people come to have a good time, but for Arthur and Guy it becomes a "place of otherness," that is, a heterotopia, a real place where the limitations of the real world can be called into question, subverted, and transcended.

The two men share their histories, in a way, translating themselves to each other. This encounter of two people "on different journeys" (478), with drastically different cultural backgrounds, in the heterotopic space of the club where their journeys are intertwined, becomes a transcultural moment. It produces a connection, both emotional and physical, between them, proceeding from a touching of hands to a kiss. This introduces the element of corporeality to this heterotopic space and moves Arthur towards a remarkably more profound sense of freedom, that is, from isolation to interaction. This fleeting moment in the heterotopic space of the club allows the emergence, or the coming to the surface, of the utopian impulse towards a world in which the oppressive categories of race, sexuality, nationality, and so on would lose their ideological stranglehold and their power to judge. What this means is that the club is transformed into a utopian space in which implications of new configurations of social reality



become visible. The text is quick to remind us, however, that this utopian enclave is fundamentally temporary, and that the limitations set by the surrounding world cannot be left behind permanently: “[Arthur] knows, too, that all [that] has dropped from him he must pick up again” (479).

In terms of heterotopia, the next significant place that the text constructs is Guy’s apartment, where he takes Arthur to spend the night. In this space, which is invested with Guy’s history, Arthur begins to see Guy as a white man: “he realizes that this is practically the very first time he has felt so at ease with a white man. But it is only now, seeing Guy in his house, standing, so to speak, among the witnesses to his inheritance, that he thinks of him as *white*” (483; original emphasis). What sets Guy apart from other white men whom Arthur has seen, however, is the fact that Guy is French, and, therefore, not directly or actively complicit in the context of American racism that has defined Arthur’s life. This seems to be a fundamental component of the feelings of freedom and safety that Arthur experiences with Guy.

The narrative shifts to the next morning, or, rather, afternoon, when the mundane space of the bedroom undergoes its most profound transformation as Arthur and Guy make love. This transient moment of the transcendence of the oppressive identity categories of race and sexuality results in what may be conceptualized as a transcultural moment of mutual understanding and the dissolving of the boundaries as they are “astounded by the other’s color—how many colors a color has! What a labyrinth!—as they descend into quiet places, only slowly, to grow up again” (485). As in many of Baldwin’s works, sex functions as a means of transcendence and points to the possibility of undermining the ideological tyranny of the cages of identity in which we are confined. To put this in terms of utopian spatiality, the heterotopia of the bedroom is transformed into a utopian enclave.

Later, Arthur and Guy have a serious discussion about race and history and each other’s position therein. When Guy expresses his dislike of Americans and Germans and also his uncertainty about wanting to be a Frenchman, given the history of European hypocrisy and racism, Arthur points out that regardless of the differences of European national and cultural identities, they all share a similar, racist understanding concerning black people. Arthur’s rather single-minded and simplifying outburst is countered by Guy’s adamant declaration that “sympathy is needed, there is no other hope” (495). He also maintains that he cannot choose his history or heritage: “I am not clinging to my history; my history is clinging to me” (496). The air having been cleared, the conversation ends in what may be regarded as a state of equilibrium.

The last heterotopic place in Paris, as configured by the text, is a jazz club which Arthur and Guy attend. They meet Sonny Carr, an old, black blues singer from America, who is performing there. The crowd is conspicuously multicultural, as it consists of Europeans, Americans (both black and white), black Africans, and North Africans. Arthur craves to connect with the Africans, but he does not know how, because there is no mutual language available for them. Here, again, the text deconstructs the category of race by discussing the variety of people in the club. Initially, Sonny Carr is described as “as black as the black Africans, and much darker, of course, than the North Africans” (502). The text, however, immediately calls this superficial epidermal view into question: “this observation is somewhat too swift; it is necessary to revise the optic through which one sees what has come to be called color” (502). The text underlines the importance of looking more closely, beyond the crudely generalized

issues of colour in order to see and understand the intricacies of the different shades and to disassemble the confines of the cages of colour in which everybody, regardless of one's power position, is trapped.

The most profoundly utopian moment in this heterotopic space occurs as Sonny asks Arthur to perform with the jazz trio that is playing in the club. As the song ends, "[t]he applause washes over him, like the sound of a crumbling wall" (512). The song becomes the language which the members of the diverse audience understand, albeit in different ways, as there something may always be lost in translation. What is crucial here, however, is that this crowd of people is united through Arthur's performance, and, in the process, the heterotopic space of the club becomes a utopian enclave, which points towards the possibility of transcending the boundaries of the oppressive identity categories according to which human beings are defined and evaluated. This is another token of the larger outline which penetrates all of Baldwin's work: the impulse towards postcategorical utopia.

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## India in Trans-late-it: Tendencies of Representation in Translating Indian Fiction

### Introduction

In my final paper, I will discuss two recent works of Indian English fiction that have been international bestsellers: Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* (2005) which was later made into a major film (Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*, 2008) and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008). I will analyse certain cultural elements of the novels in the English original and their Finnish translations, *Tyhjentävä vastaus, eli kuka voittaa miljardin*, trans. Pirkko Biström (WS Bookwell 2005) and *Valkoinen leijona*, trans. Tarja Teva (Avain 2009).<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of the symposium, however, I concentrate on Swarup's book.<sup>21</sup>

Swarup's novel textually explicitly represents India for the reader in a transcultural context. While it is written *by* an Indian *about* India, it is published for the international English-speaking audience. As a diplomat, Swarup can be defined as a diasporic writer. Yet the themes and issues of the novel are current socio-political matters in India – from communalism to corruption and the Indian cinema to poverty – but the context is transcultural global media setting with the American NewAge Telemedia company running the show *Who Will Win a Billion*, modelled after the actual *Kaun banega crorepati* – Who Wants to be a Millionaire?<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the identificational context and underlying conflict is *intra*-cultural, not *cross*-cultural – between the poor and the rich – just like in *White Tiger*.

In my paper I discuss how the representation of India is further handled and transmitted in the translations. The aim is to consider the translation strategies in translating transcultural texts, the prerequisites for transcultural readership, and the challenges these pose for analysis.

### Transcultural translation

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in post-colonial, transcultural and transnational translation (see e.g. Niranjana 1992; Dingwaney & Maier 1995; Robinson 1997; Venuti 1998; Bassnett & Trivedi 1998; Simon & St. Pierre 2000; Apter 2001; Cronin 2004; Buzelin 2007; Bandia 2008). This interest stems, firstly, from the increasing and intensifying cultural contacts in our globalizing world and, secondly, from the emphatic focus on the questions of alterity and representation of the Other in post-colonial theory. Where all translation can be seen as instigated by difference, or in Walter Benjamin's (2004, 19) terms *foreignness* – whether linguistic, cultural, geographical, or historical –, in

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<sup>20</sup> Here, I am not looking for mistakes or lapses in the translations nor am I trying to evaluate them in terms of quality assessment. Instead, I will be discussing comparatively the strategies of intercultural dialogue adopted in both the original and the translated versions. Both Biström and Teva are established translators who have some experience in translating Indian cultural texts. Biström has translated a collection of Mahatma Gandhi's aphorisms (*Rauhan sanat*, 1988), while Teva has translated Karin Fossum's Norwegian detective novel *Rakas Poona* (2001) which has Indian elements and characters. Further references to the source text and the target text are given parenthetically, preceded by QA and TV.

<sup>21</sup> Swarup's second novel is *Six Suspects* (2009; Finnish translation *Syylisten seurue* by Eva Siikarla, WSOY 2010)

<sup>22</sup> Four seasons since 2000, the fifth is scheduled for October 2011.

the case of transnational and post-colonial translation this preliminary difference is further heightened by historically contextual relations of power. For example James Clifford (1997, 182; emphasis added) sees such cross-cultural translation as anything but neutral:

Cross-cultural translation is never entirely neutral; it is enmeshed in **relations of power**. One enters the translation process from a specific location, from which one only partly escapes. In successful translation, the access to something alien – another language, culture, or code – is substantial. Something different is brought over, made available for understanding, appreciation, consumption.

In the aftermath of such new orientations it can be assumed that these emerging theories and practices have transformational effects also on translating and translations. If earlier there has been (and continues to be; see Sengupta 1994, 172) interest in translating the Other as *exotic*, it can be argued that attention in translation is now paid more to multicultural contextuality and the intricacies of intercultural dialogue. Although I will not be discussing the ethical aspects in more detail here, it can be said that this change has not taken place accidentally or involuntarily but through a serious engagement with the ethical and political dimensions of (post-colonial) translation (see Sengupta 1994, 172; Bassnett & Trivedi 1998, 17; Spivak 2004, 397; Bandia 2008, 230). Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (1998, 17) refer specifically to an “increasing awareness of the unequal power relations involved in the transfer of texts across cultures”, and it is in this spirit of awareness that my analysis is conducted.

India translates intriguingly. The literary works from India that make their way into the international market and get translated are often peculiar, and receive ambiguous if not hostile reviews in India. Despite this, translated Indian literature has found its readers and it is of interest to how India does, then, get translated, translate, and transform in the translation?

### **Translation strategies**

Translation across cultures is the more difficult the more removed the respective cultures are culturally and linguistically from each other. In Finland, very few Indian books get translated, and they are almost exclusively translated from English.<sup>23</sup> The cultural distance is marked, and there is no clearly established vocabulary for translating Indian works.

In general, to overcome this difficulty, the translator uses various strategies in translating. In her book *In Other Words* Mona Baker (1992) outlines seven translation strategies.<sup>24</sup> Here I discuss only one of Baker’s (1992, 34) strategies to illustrate the translation of *Q & A*, namely “Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation”. This is the most common strategy in this case, although for

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<sup>23</sup> There are some lapses in the rendition of Hindi phrases in the translation: “*Jeet*” (QA 212 becomes “*eet*” (TV 93) and “*Sabki*” (QA 112-113) “*Sabhi*” (TV 101). Also “Hey” in the Hindi phrase “Hey Ram”(QA 23) is taken as English and translated as “Hei Ram” (TV 18). On the other hand, the French “*cervettes au gratin* (QA 130) is corrected to “*crevettes au gratin* (TV 117).

<sup>24</sup> The seven strategies Baker (1992, 23–43) distinguishes are: 1 Translation by a more general word or superordinate, 2 Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word, 3 Translation by cultural substitution, 4 Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation, 5 Translation by paraphrase using a related word, 6 Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words, 7 Translation by illustration.

example “translation by cultural substitution” is used in translating the term “chawl” (e.g. QA 31, 70, 267) which is varyingly translated as ”vuokrakasarmi” (*tenement*, TV 26), ”talo” (*house*, TV 61), or ”huone” (*room*, TV 246).

In analyses, translation strategies can be positioned on a continuum of cultural transpositioning. This term, developed by Sándor G. J. Hervey and Ian Higgins in their book *Thinking Translation* (1992, 28), encompasses five different degrees of adaptation of the source text on a scale from exotic (dominated by the source language) to cultural transplantation (dominated by the target language): Exoticism, Cultural borrowing, Calque,<sup>25</sup> Communicative translation, and Cultural transplantation (Hervey & Higgins 1992, 28–34). On this scale, Baker’s loan word strategy would correspond with *cultural borrowing*. Of interest here is the ways in which both *Q & A* and *Tyhjentävä vastaus* engage with loan words/cultural borrowings. Cultural borrowings are, after all, “words that fill gaps in the recipient language’s store of words because they stand for objects or concepts new to the language’s culture” (Myers-Scotton 2006, 212), “when corresponding vocabulary is missing in the borrowing language” (Sailaja 2009, 71). While the Finnish translation is an *interlanguage* translation of the original, the original, too, can be argued to engage in *intralanguage* translation in its strategies of representation as the text is multilingual, not simply an English text – although arguably an *Indian English* text.

### **‘Foreign’ words**

One of the common features of transcultural writing is the use of special vocabularies and terminologies of the respective cultures and languages. It is a common practice in many of such works that these terms are also italicized to point out that they belong to another language or culture than the one in which they are introduced (Dickins, Hervey & Higgins 2002, 32). This has a foreignizing and even exoticizing function for “*something foreign is by definition exotic*” (ibid.). An English language work of Indian literature is always balancing between domestication and foreignization when it tries to represent Indian culture and life through linguistic choices.

This is also the case in Swarup’s book as it uses quite a lot of Indian words for cultural phenomena, food and cooking, clothes and dressing, terms of address, musical terminology, exclamations, and so on. In a word, it uses intralanguage translation strategies in the way it incorporates words from different languages. Some of these are unmarked, while others are in Italics. The Finnish translation, then, sometimes follows this practice but in many cases there are differences in the usage of Italics.

#### *Unmarked*

As examples of unmarked, unitalicized words we can mention ”salwar kameez” (QA 25, 176; in Finnish ”salvarkamiz” TV 20, 160) and ”sari” (e.g. QA 187, 247 [24 times]; TV 171, 227), ”chicken biryani and seekh kebabs” (QA 13; “kanabiriania ja sikh kababia 8) and “samosa” (e.g. QA 38, 178; TV 32, 163), and “Sahib and Memsahib” (QA 126; TV 113) as well as the suffix “-ji” denoting respect, as in

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<sup>25</sup> Calque is defined as “an expression that consists of TL words and respects TL syntax, but is unidiomatic in the TL because it is modelled on the structure of a SL expression” (Hervey & Higgins 1992, 33).

“Panditji” (QA 100; TV 89).<sup>26</sup> The fact that these words are unmarked signals their assimilation into the English language from various Indian languages (Sailaja 2009, 69–71).

### *Marked*

In many instances, however, such ‘foreign’ words are in Italics both in the ST and the TT, suggesting a cultural difference.<sup>27</sup> Examples of this are ”*bindi*” (QA 25; TV 20) and “*tilak*” (QA 98; TV 87), “*laddoo*” (QA 308, TV 286) and “*puri*” (QA 177; TV 161), as well as ”*zamindar*” (QA 94; TV 84) and ”*firang*” (QA 139; TV 126). Many of these words could fall in the previous category of unmarked, assimilated words but here for some reason they are distanced from the ordinary. This is all the more marked as word from other languages remain unitalicized in the ST: for example the Arabic “Hajj” (QA 54; TV 47), the Japanese “Arigato” (QA 282; TV 260), and the Spanish “chorizo” (QA 129; TV 116) – in the TT these all are, however, in Italics.

### *Varying usage*

While both ST and TT usually concur in their use of Italics, there are some notable differences. In some cases the ST uses Italics but the TT does not. Significant examples of this would be “*dupatta*” (QA 25; TV 20)<sup>28</sup> and “*paan*” (QA 92; TV 81).<sup>29</sup> Why the TT has left out the Italics is not clear, as these cultural items are not familiar in the Finnish context. The translator might have considered them as such, or it might be a case of lapse in the production.

The other way round is perhaps easier to understand, when the ST is unmarked and the TT is marked. Good examples of this would be “*dacoit*” (QA 102; TV 91),<sup>30</sup> ”*Diwali*” (QA 196; ”*diwali*” TV 179), and ”*Hakim*” (QA 120; TV 108), where the Italics in the TT indicate cultural distance, while the unmarked status of the ST indicates cultural and linguistic proximity. A different case can be found in the next example where the ST is unmarked (”*plays matka*” QA 28) and the TT is marked (”*pelaa matka*” TV 23). The rationale here for the Italics is that ”*matka*” is also a Finnish word for *travel* and needs to be differentiated from the Indian term.<sup>31</sup>

### **‘Foreign’ words and explanations**

Another feature often combined with the use of italicized ‘foreign’ words is *explanation*, or gloss (cf. Nida 2003, 159). An unfamiliar word that is given in Italics can be explained right after the word

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<sup>26</sup> In one occasion, the Finnish translation transforms the suffix into another construction: ”*Sirjee*” (QA 212) is translated as ”*Herra päällikkö*” (*master chief*; TV 193). Also the English version varies from the normal form ”-ji” in using the parallel form ”-jee”.

<sup>27</sup> Sometimes the function could be seen more as emphasis rather than marking of cultural difference but Swarup does not use Italics for emphasis (cf. Levenston 1992, 94).

<sup>28</sup> However, the equivalent term ”*chunni*” is italicized in both (QA 176; TV 160 – except that the TT is not consistent in this: see TV 165 & 170).

<sup>29</sup> Here again, both the ST and the TT use Italics for ”*beedis*” (QA 104; ”*bidi*” TV 93).

<sup>30</sup> Here the TT is irregular in its use of Italics. Sailaja (2009, 71) comments that *dacoit* was assimilated into the English language already in the 19th century.

<sup>31</sup> The similar gambling game ”*satta*” is unitalicized in both versions (QA 233; TV 213) while the game of *kabaddi* (QA 71; TV 62) is italicized in both.

(maybe in brackets). Sometimes even footnotes or a glossary may be provided (either by the author, translator, or publisher/editor). Swarup uses Italics for cultural borrowings, and there are sometimes explanations in the text as in the following example: “junk-dealer, or *kabariwallah*” (QA 132; ”romukauppias, *kabariwalla*” TV 119). This feature is, however, quite limited in the ST. In the TT, then, there are a couple of instances, where an explanation is added to the text, as in the following examples. The ST has ”*lungis*” (QA 104) while the TT has “*lungi-lannevaatetta*” (*a loin-cloth*; TV 93), “*beedis*” (QA 104) in the ST are ”*bidi-savukkeita*” (*beedi* cigarettes; TV 93) in the TT, and “*tabeez*” (QA 94) is translated as ”*tabeez-amuletti*” (*an amulet*; TV 83). In these cases, a brief explanation is given as to the meaning of the word when it is first used. Such explanations most often give the impression of being addressed to an outsider who does not have knowledge of a given cultural phenomenon. Like Italics, explanations have on the one hand a foreignizing function and on the other hand a pedagogical, familiarizing function.

In the following example the explanation in the ST is further enhanced in the TT:

starched *kurta* pyjamas made of *khadi* cotton cloth (QA 91  
tärkättyä kurtaa ja käsin kehrätystä *khadi*-puuvillasta tehtyjä pyjamahousuja (TV 81)

The TT does not italicize ”kurta” but further explains ”*khadi*” as *hand-woven*. For an Indian reader, *khadi* is familiar through the Gandhian practice of anticolonial protest through weaving ones own cloths, while for the Finnish readership this invites a note.

One relevant semantic field for the novel is numerals, for the context is a quiz show with a high prize. Here especially two terms are of interest: “lakh” and “crore” which are used for “one hundred thousand” and “ten million”, respectively. These Hindi words are normally used when talking about large sums, and they are employed in *Q & A*, although not consistently. In the Finnish context, these are not familiar, and therefore it is not unexpected that the first instance of “one lakh rupees” (QA 171) is both italicized and explained: ”yhden rupia-*lakhin*, siis sadantuhannen rupian” (*one hundred thousand rupees*; TV 155). The construction of the phrase, however, is unconventional and complex, indicating that the term and its semantic function are not familiar. Also the ST sometimes reverts to the non-Indian practice and uses for example “five hundred thousand rupees” (QA 221; TV 202) instead of \**five lakh(s)*. For the “crore”, then, the TT simply omits the term and substitutes (cf. Baker 1992, 34) it with ten million as in “for ten crores” (QA 336) in ST and “sadan miljoonan arvoinen” (*worth a hundred million*; TV 311) in the TT. Here again, the ST is not consistent, occasionally using the phrase “ten million rupees” (QA 272; TV 250) instead.

### **“Monkeys do not speak. Especially not in English”: Initial conclusions**

Contemporary post-colonial transcultural fiction often deals with identity questions connected to the issues of tradition and modernity, problems of ethnocentricity and xenophobia, rewriting of history and identity, impossibility of return, and processes of cultural translation, unlearning and relearning. In this questioning, they tend not to offer simple solutions to these issues but confront the problematics in more

complex ways. One example of this is Swarup's book which confronts the socio-political issues of contemporary India.

One dimension in which this critical position is present in the novel is the linguistic level. While apparently translating a (mainly) Hindi setting into an English one, it at the same time points at the importance of English in India – even for the poor.<sup>32</sup> The protagonist Ram Mohammad Thomas – an avatar of the idea of a secular, multicultural India – learns English and uses it to his advantage, but also keeps it a secret especially from the authorities who treat him as an animal: “Monkeys do not speak. Especially not in English” (QA 15; TV 11). Ram is vindicating himself by refusing to understand English – an apt albeit problematic stance in (and for) a transcultural English text.

In post-colonial translation theory, emphasis is on contextual specificity. If we as scholars, translators and readers do not focus on that, there is the possibility of creating misunderstanding instead of understanding. We need to be reminded of the importance of remaining alert to the cultural specificities in writing, translating and reading. I have here made one detailed analysis of a novel in order to see how the specificities function in translation. Through the examples, I have tried to show how intra- and intercultural translation can make a difference in transcultural discourse.

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<sup>32</sup> This feature is present also in *White Tiger*, which provides a fruitful point for comparison.



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### **Transculturation and Perspective in Modernism and Postcolonialism: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Assia Djebar's *So Vast the Prison***

This paper takes its cue from Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*. Completed in 1656, this painting is at once a product of, and a significant contribution to, The Renaissance and the Age of the Baroque. And yet this remarkable painting is also something more than, and different from, the period of which it is a constituent element. For the French philosopher Michel Foucault, *Las Meninas* problematizes representation in a radically new way. It does so not least by distorting and extending our notion of perspective. Who or what is the orienting perspective in *Las Meninas*? I posit that both the question and the difficulty of providing a precise answer bear a relation to significant aspects of transculturation.

By linking perspective to transculturation, and also to Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone, I will attempt to show not only how closely related these terms are, but also how perspective can improve our understanding of how transculturation operates and contact zones are constituted. The discussion will focus on selected, illustrative textual passages from my two chosen texts. While Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a key text and an important point of reference in modernist literature and postcolonial studies alike, Assia Djebar's *Vast the Prison* is an interesting example of a postcolonial novel characterized by significant elements of history and biography. Moreover, both texts are variants of travel accounts—fictional stories based on, and made possible by, actual journeys made by Conrad and Djebar as historical authors.

In their still very helpful *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin note that transculturation “refers to the reciprocal influences of modes of representation and cultural practices of various kinds in colonies and metropolises, and is thus ‘a phenomenon of the contact zone’, as Mary Louise Pratt puts it” (Ashcroft et al. 233). Yet although, as this definition suggests, such influences may be “reciprocal,” Pratt specifies that contact zones are social spaces where “disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (Pratt 4).

I define perspective as the narrative agent that perceives. Seen thus, the term refers not just to the agent that sees (in contrast to the one that tells) but to different forms and degrees of perception not limited to the narrator only. Moreover, as Mieke Bal has pointed out, perspective does not necessarily refer exclusively to the agent that perceives or focalizes, it can also be linked to the agent that is being focalized (Bal 143). Seen thus, perspective is a dual phenomenon, and various kinds and degrees of spatial and attitudinal distance can obtain between the focalizer and the focalized.

My first example is the first paragraph of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This opening is told by a frame narrator—an anonymous narrator who will later introduce us to Marlow and who also, after having served as Marlow's narratee, passes Marlow's story on to the reader. While the frame narrator's

voice is relatively stable here, his perspective varies more than it seems to do at first sight. One essential part of the frame narrator's function is to introduce, and establish, a constellation of characters and a location that, once Marlow has been introduced and starts telling his tale, becomes a narrative situation. Ross Chambers has drawn attention to the manner in which, at a deep and frequently unthematized level, the narrator's motivation to narrate is complemented by the narratee's readiness to listen, and that, for both parties, possibilities of gain as well as risks of loss are involved (Chambers 51). The narrative situation in *Heart of Darkness* illustrates this important point. By listening to Marlow the narratee risks losing, or being drawn out of, a comfortable position of ignorance, yet the fact that he not only listens but retells what Marlow has told him suggests a notable learning process, and thus the possibility of gaining essential knowledge.

The effects of perspectival change become particularly striking at the end of the passage. The word "haze" draws attention to the way in which the frame narrator focalizes and yet cannot bring into sharp focus what he is seeing. The distinctly impressionist quality of this description situates the essentially physical observations in a specific geographical context. One effect is to imbibe us with a shadowy dusk impression of London. Additionally, the physicality of the impression serves to curiously restrict yet also enhance the metaphorical implications. The physicality not only provides the basis for but also stands in contrast to the metaphoric dimension, challenging its conventional associations and asking us to reconsider them as complex meanings obfuscating the simpler binaries of light and darkness. Inducing us to challenge the idea and ideals of empire and a Victorian audience's understanding of context, it also prepares us for Marlow's opening remark.

Moreover, there is a significant variant of perspective at the end of the paragraph. Particularly striking is the apparently contradictory way in which London is focalized. On the one hand, the frame narrator describes London as the "greatest" town on earth. This description aligns him not just with his narratees but also with Conrad's implied reader. As in the case of the distinction and communicative interplay of narrator and narratee, *Heart of Darkness* is also a good illustration of the difference between implied reader on the one hand and historical or actual reader on the other. On the other hand, earlier on in the same sentence the frame narrator refers to the town "Gravesend" and to the "mournful gloom" brooding over London. These words signal a perspective that is very different from the much more conventional one of considering London as the "greatest" town on earth—an evaluation probably shared by virtually all the implied readers of the novella. This more radical, questioning perspective is contrasted with the earlier one, yet both are linked to the frame narrator as focalizer. Seen thus, "Gravesend" and "mournful gloom" are very interesting examples of reciprocal influences of modes of representation. On a second or third reading of the novella, they simultaneously anticipate and confirm constituent elements of the contact zone.

In *The Ethics of Travel*, Syed Islam distinguishes between sedentary travel and nomadic travel. For Islam, the sedentary form of travel settles for "a representational practice that scarcely registers an encounter with the other" (Islam vii). While sedentary travel carries out a representation of difference, nomadic travel involves, even necessitates, an encounter with the other that challenges our conventional system of representation and our habitual perspective. An illustrative example of uneasy, problematic combination of the two variants of travel identified by Islam is observable in my second example, the

so-called “Grove of Death” scene in *Heart of Darkness*. The suggestion here is that, like Dante in the Inferno part of *Divina Commedia* (1321), Marlow has entered a hell distinguished by utter despair and unspeakable suffering. And yet, again like Dante, as a traveller Marlow can *move through* this hell, a hell on earth made possible by white Europeans exploiting the Blacks as slaves and working them to death (as did the Nazis in a concentration and extermination camp such as Auschwitz). That Marlow does very little in order to help the dying Blacks is of course morally dubious. But at least he is shocked by what he sees, and both he and Conrad have the courage to report the brutal acts with which they were confronted. Although Marlow senses that the dying Blacks also perceive him, or his presence, he does not know what or how much they perceive, and he is deeply troubled by his own ignorance of the Blacks’ experiential register. The predominant perspective here is that of the returning gaze—a gaze signifying not just suffering but also a silent protest. It is as though Marlow momentarily senses the force of the Blacks’ indigenous language in their gaze. Magnified and dramatized through fiction, Conrad’s language expresses, however inadequately, an accusation simultaneously prompted by and rooted in a specific historical reality: that of slavery.

Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski was born in Berdyczów in Ukraine in 1857, Assia Djébar was born in Cherchell, a coastal town near Algiers in Algeria, in 1936. While young Józef, his family and his nation were the victims of imperialist expansion and suppression, and while Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is inspired by his trip to Belgian Congo in 1890, Assia spent her childhood and youth in a country suppressed and controlled by the colonial power of France. Different as they are, the two writers share a lasting concern with issues of identity (including changing identities), power (political and cultural), language and communication. For Djébar as for Conrad, moreover, narrative perspective plays a key role in the authors’ sustained attempts to identify and negotiate various kinds of linguistic disruption, suppression and marginalization.

The narrator in *Vaste est la prison* (1995) is a modern, educated Algerian female character living in a society dominated by male characters, and leading a life of contradictions and tensions. Investing the protagonist with elements of her own biography yet retaining a considerable distance from her fictional character, Djébar presents cross-cultural issues by writing in French of an Arab society. I will discuss the aesthetic and ethical effects of contrasting the actual act of writing with the strong oral traditions of the indigenous culture in Algeria. Referring to illustrative examples and highlighting variants of perspective, I will link this discussion to the narrative and thematic role of a narrator-protagonist who has experienced revolution in a now postcolonial country, and who at the time of writing is an Algerian living in exile in France.

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### **Joycean Echoes in Latgalian Literature**

After publishing of the superb Latvian translation of Joyce's "Ulysses" produced by the Latvian émigré writer Dzintars Sodums (1922–2008) (first published in emigration in 1960, and only in 1993 an edited version of Sodums' text appeared in Latvia), it was expected that a new age would start in Latvian literature. Actually, the first reviewers of the translation expressed their regret that the translation of Joyce's novel appeared so late: Aina Neboisa in her review in Latvian émigré journal "Jaunā Gaita" (1961 No. 32) writes that Latvian literature would have a totally different face if Joyce's novel had been known to Latvians at the time of its production. The critic mentions the absolute freedom of artist as the main Joycean landmark, an idea that Latvian writers failed to produce themselves. However, even after publishing of the translation, the reflections of Joyce's style and manner in contemporary Latvian writing were not so many as might have been expected, or at least they were not so straightforward as to be easily noticeable. Literary scholar Ilva Skulte mentions two major novels that were inspired in the 1990s by the "rediscovery" of James Joyce's "Ulysses": Aivars Ozoliņš' "Dukts" (1991) and Oskars Seiksts and Valentins Lukaševičs' novel "Valerian's Life and Views" ("Valerjana dzeive i redzīni", 1996) written in Latgalian. Skulte relates the interest in Joyce's poetics to the interest in language aroused in the context of national awakening in the early 90s that evoked the desire in writers and poets "to explore the flow of words, language style, usage, word-play and metaphors". It is noteworthy that both novels mentioned by Skulte belong to the two literary traditions existing in Latvia – Latvian ("Dukts") and Latgalian ("Valerian's Life and Views").

Acknowledging the profusion of Joycean poetics, the two foci set by the above mentioned critics were those that inspired Latvian writers and poets most of all. As regards the novels mentioned by Skulte, Ozoliņš' "Dukts" is mostly concerned with language as the medium of reality and radical experiments in this respect, while Seiksts and Lukaševičs' "Valerian's Life and Views" constructs a particular ('Joycean') vision of the world and cultural awareness marked by the sense of fragmentation of the human existence, nostalgia for reunification with some indeterminate and irretrievably lost marker of wholeness, striving for transcendence of an ugly and dissatisfactory reality and other features. In this respect it stands out as one of the most interesting embodiments of Joycean poetic expression that sets a new horizon for Latgalian literature and is also quite unique in recent Latvian fiction.

Latgalian literary tradition is younger than Latvian tradition (the first books – religious texts – published in Latvian appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, while in Latgalian in the 18<sup>th</sup>; first original writers' works of fiction in Latvian appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century while in Latgalian – after 1904). Yet, due to the historical circumstances (different regions of the territory of Latvia belonging to different powers – in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Latgale remained a part of Polish-Lithuanian Inflantia while most of Livonia or north-eastern part of Latvia was ceded to Sweden but in the western part of Latvia there was the semi-independent Duchy of Courland; by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century all regions had been ceded to the Russian

Empire), its development has been uneven, with several print bans (the first official print ban was in 1865-1904 in the framework of Russification policy of the Russian Empire, another was, according to Valdis Zeps, *de facto* ban in 1934-1943 during the autocratic regime of Kārlis Ulmanis and Nazi occupation and during the Soviet period) and the predominance of oral, applied and folkloric literature and culture forms until nowadays. Despite the discontinuous development of Latgalian culture and literary tradition (with periods of upsurge in 1904-1934, 1944-1985 in emigration, and after 1986 in Latvia) and the on-going debates as to the status of Latgalian language/dialect, it has produced a number of distinct authors and culture figures, e.g. Francis Trasuns, Francis Kemps, Marija Andžāne, Anna Rancāne, Antons Kūkojs, Oskars Seiksts, Valentins Lukaševičs, etc. (Salceviča 2005) Oskars Seiksts and Valentins Lukaševičs, poets and prose writers, are actually the brightest representatives of the young, post-independence generation of Latgalian authors. They are co-authors of two works – the collection of poetry “Seppuku iz saulis vādara” (1995) and the novel “Valerian’s Life and Views” (1996). Apart from that, they write poetry and prose individually.

“Valerian’s Life and Views” is a novel with a dense intertextual structure. On the one hand, the intertextuality of the novel is inwardly directed and self-referential: the whole text is printed in italics as if it were one long citation which reveals a multitude of citations within. These are citations of Latgalian history (e.g. the Congress of Rēzekne in 1917 regarding the status of Latgale region in Latvia and Latgalian dialect), citations of Latgalian religious writers and priests’ expressions (e.g. J. Macilevičs “Pavuiceišona” (Teaching)), citations of Latgalian anecdotes, tall tales, folk witticisms, etc. Hence, the text is constructed as a kind of a transcript of ‘Latgalian’ discourse representing the way Latgalians think and speak and specifically Latgalian humour. It may be regarded as a transcript of Latgalian mentality, introducing a lens reflecting Latgalian world outlook.

On the other hand, the novel is embedded into a wider context exploding the world of the novel into a thick fabric of postmodernist cultural awareness. The narration is framed by a reference to 12 October, the date of discovering America. The narration begins in April stating that there are six months until 12 October when the narrator will see the new land towards which he is setting out. However, at the end of the novel when this date comes, nothing changes. The narrator returns from work and performs the same weird actions that at the beginning of the novel he observes as performed by one of the numerous anonymous characters: he makes tea, drinks it up from a glass, then smashes the glass against the wall, goes to the bathroom to wash his socks, pours glass chippings into the socks and pegs them onto the clothes-line, then turns on the radio, starts thinking and returns to the bathroom to pour the chippings from his socks into the pockets of his pants, at night he climbs onto the roof, sits on the parapet and counts the blue and then the red lights, after getting to the yellow ones, he jumps down, picks up the parts of his flesh that have come off and buries them under the doorstep, in the morning he drinks aperitif from a half-litre jar, etc.

Quest for the New World actually turns out to be a cyclical journey leading in all directions and nowhere; the intersection of motion and stillness is symbolized by the bus-station as the central topos of the novel where the narrator with three other guys (who form the collective 1<sup>st</sup> person ‘we’ narrator) are hanging around boozing and watching people come and go. Their own position is rather Buddhist-like (thus introducing Buddhism and Daoism as significant intertexts of the novel):

*WE HAD TO DO NOTHING AND EVERYTHING GOT TO BE DONE BY ITSELF FOR US. WE WENT NOWHERE AND EVERYTHING CAME TO US ITSELF.* (Here and henceforth translation mine – S.M.) (Seiksts, Lukaševičs 1996: 8)

The motifs of being on the road, journey without destination, of intoxication as liberation and ecstasy of mind relate this novel to the Joycean tradition. The major emblem of intoxication and liberation in the novel, Lelais Kryštopš (the Great Christopher) – the cheap brandy drunk by the four guys at the bus-station – is associated with both Christopher Columbus and a Latvian mythological character, Lielais Kristaps (the Great Kristaps) the patron of Riga who carried people across the river Daugava and stood in for the weak. Christopher (Latvian *Kristaps*, Latgalian *Kryštopš*) is a characteristic sample of an intertextual marker in the novel that links all three denotations (the historical person, the mythological hero, and the name of brandy) constructing a new field of connotation associating motifs of exploration, heroic mission and patronage, and Dionysian liberation, all of which function as major motifs in the novel.

“Valerian’s Life and Views” is also marked by intertextuality as defined by the French psychoanalytical and poststructuralist theorist Julia Kristeva, i.e. intertextuality as a manifestation of the multiplicity of the writing subject as a subject-in-process (Fr. *le sujet-en-procès*) (Kristeva 1980). This is first of all reflected in the narrative of the novel that possesses a fragmented structure characteristic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature: there is no single narrator but a fluid continuum of narration in which the collective narrator (‘we’) prevails, occasionally splitting up into several voices that are hardly identifiable or not at all. The same concerns the characters that are also volatile, overlapping and perform rather textual functions than referential (social, psychological, etc.) ones.

The collective narrator appears in the novel as a group of onlookers, four guys, sitting motionless at the intersection of bus routes connecting the urban and the rural (one may judge that the bus-station is situated in Rēzekne, the central town in Latgale, with lots of buses going to rural regions around), home and abroad (Lithuania, Belarus, Poland that are historically related to Latgale)); their still and silent action is observing the people and the world going by. Their observations are poetically transformed into clusters of associations, mythical parallels, rhythmic cadences of inner monologue, musically sounding and chanted phrases that altogether create the weird world of the novel in which surprising things happen, absurd reigns supreme and the humble base of human existence gains a poetic and philosophical dimension.

Among these four is the poet Anvs Tiļne; however, he is not individualized as a subject of the poetic vision even if we attribute the central position in creating this vision to him, a good reason for which might be the fact that the name Anvs Tiļne is an anagram of Vaļentins, the first name of one of the co-authors of the novel, Valentins Lukaševičs, spelt in Latgalian. Anvs Tiļne first appears as a character in a narrator’s discourse stating that he first heard of him at the university when one of the guys failed the examination because he drew an examination question on Tiļne and didn’t know anything about this poet. This is followed by a citation of the poem which may be perceived as composed by Anvs Tiļne and represents a Latgalian epic song about how Lake Cyrms got its name. The



poem is an ironic stylization of the epic genre, alluding to ancient Greek mythology through the image of a young girl being born from the foamy waters of the lake, with a harp under her arm shining as the sun in the sky. The ironic overtone of the poem endows the figure of Anvs Tiļne with a kind of ironic halo of Latgalian classic echoed further in the text in openly parodic references to literary discourse and literary theory and criticism.

Further on, the narrator admits that actually he is the one who is called Anvs Tiļne; yet he admits this as a kind of degrading fact. The narrator's identity is further expanded beyond any limited subjecthood to a multitude of figures that actually appear further in the novel in the form of minor characters popping up in the fragmented episodes of narration: the passenger – a 'southern looking' crank hanging around the bus station leading philosophically absurd conversation; Latgalian activists and political leaders Trasuns and Kempis engaged in the debate over the political status of Latgale within the newly established independent Latvian state; students discussing their studies and watching people through the window of the dorms; Valerjans and Donats boozing and discussing local politics in an early twentieth-century Latgalian rural homestead; the black symbolical mastiff that is desired by Tiļne, a dog that gets killed in a trap while the narrator is chasing an imaginary burglar, etc.

At the end of the novel Tiļne is revealed as a would-be writer. Hence, in a somewhat Proustian manner, the diffuse subject of the narration is revealed as a writing subject that may be imagined as the focus bringing together the scattered narrator and character identities. However, according to Kristeva, writing subject is always a subject-in-process (Kristeva 1980: 124), transcending a focused identity; traditionally it was manifested in the plurality of characters, while in the twentieth-century modernist literature it appears in the fragmented narrative, a polylogue (Guberman 1996: 190). This facilitates what Kristeva calls 'a reader's intertextuality' – putting into process our identities in the act of reading (ibid.), traversing the multitude of poetic instances without the need to identify with a certain "individualized" position, thus gaining access to limitless sources of anxiety (of a loss of meaning alias loss of self) on the one hand, and gratification (sexual pleasure, working out crisis of subjectivity, resolving the risk of psychosis in narrative experience) on the other (ibid.: 193).

The poetic mode of narration in "Valerian's Life and Views" brings out a number of instances of anxiety and gratification. One of them is the motif of death that recurs in the narration both as an object of philosophical reflection and an ultimate limit of language and subjectivity, fearful and desirable, poeticized through melancholic and feminine metaphors. For instance, the narrator states that the novel is actually dedicated to the priest who hanged himself having written a couplet shortly before committing suicide:

*TODAY I WISH TO SAY ALL AND IN SIMPLE WORDS –  
DEATH IS A WOMAN WITH A WISTFUL SMILE AND IN SUNNY AUTUMN WIND.* (Seiksts,  
Lukaševičs 1996: 9)

The tramp met by the narrators shares his experience of having suddenly realized that he should stop running away from death along the moonlit road as she already surrounds him amid her banks and supermarkets, and meeting her among familiar things is what he actually desires. Narrators' reflections

of fragmentation and diverse states of transformation also point to death as the ultimate limit of subjectivity, the point of fusion and re-emergence. It generally seems that the whole narration actually maps out the search for the ways of transcendence, going beyond the limits of reality, and the two major routes followed are those of transcending identities and the established modes of reasoning. The major instance of gratification in the novel is channelled via celebrating the profusion (of forms of experience, transformation, transcendence) of the poetic vision available for the narrators and, for that matter, for the reader.

In the end when the expected date of 12 October has approached and the narrative cycle has come to a close (this is marked also by switching off TV watching of which initiated the action at the beginning of the narrative – the narrator first appears as watching TV and wishing to get into the places shown on it), the narrator in a very Barthesian sense admits the fact of dying together with the title hero, Valerjans (who is actually a marginal occurrence appearing just in some episodes; the semantics of the name – ‘valerian’ – is of importance as it denotes a source of intoxication as well as traditional medication for heart diseases). The narrating voice is passed over to an anonymous male character who recounts his absurd actions that repeat those observed by the narrator at the beginning of the novel:

*AT NIGHT I WILL CLIMB ONTO THE ROOF, SIT ON THE PARAPET COUNTING BLUE AND THEN RED LIGHTS. WHEN I GET TO THE YELLOW ONES, I WILL JUMP OFF. I WILL PICK UP THE PARTS OF MY FLESH THAT HAVE COME OFF AND BURY THEM UNDER THE DOORSTEP. IN THE MORNING I WILL DRINK APERITIF FROM A HALF-LITRE JAR.*  
(Seiksts, Lukaševičs 1996: 181)

Joining the beginning and end of the novel by the repeated actions of, first the hero, and then the narrator that turn into a kind of magic formula of dying and rebirth, the cyclical character of the narrative is brought out conveying the grand scale of time and life reaching far beyond any limited individual scale of subject awareness. In this regard the self-referential voice of narrator, especially by admitting its death, emphasizes the relativity of narrative voice and consequently unmasks the vacant place of a ‘speaker’ leaving just language speaking itself.

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### **Ijc Anonkoh efac fyfno ikrfb: Language, Translation, and Identity in Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses***

The work of the Pakistani author Kamila Shamsie is characterized by a sensitivity to language: her novels contain various puns, allusions, and, as in her 2005 novel *Broken Verses*, poetry and translation. The role of language and translation is, however, emphasised in *Broken Verses* as the translation becomes a way of reconstructing its protagonist's traumatized identity. A novel set in Karachi in the early 2000s, *Broken Verses* focuses on the life of the 31-year-old Asmaani, a research assistant at a local television station and the daughter of a Pakistani feminist icon Samina Akram who disappeared mysteriously 14 years earlier.

Combining elements of the mystery story with Asmaani's attempt to come to terms with the loss of her mother and the earlier death of her mother's lover, the revolutionary poet Nazim, the novel foregrounds ideas of language and translation as ways of addressing post-colonial identity formation. This is seen most evidently in the series of letters written by an unknown person but using a code known only to Asmaani, her mother, and the Poet, now dead for 16 years. During the process of translating the letters, which turn out to be fake and written by her boyfriend Ed rather than the Poet, Asmaani is forced to encounter her past. In so doing the novel links the process of translation with questions of history, aesthetics, and language, as well as with the reconstruction of identity. Thus the notion of translation, evoked in Shamsie's novel through cryptology in particular, is concerned less with operations than the transformation of identity. In other words, by translating the letters undermining her narrative of self, Asmaani translates herself from the past to the present and assumes a different identity position. Writing and translating are means of constructing – and excavating – alternative stories, histories, and memories through language and, as Asmaani's story shows, they may offer solace from the demands of the past.

While post-colonial scholars have studied translation and translations in various ways, a central thematic has dealt with questions of power and domination in relation to various colonial and post-colonial contexts. The emphasis has been on the crosscultural effects of translation: what happens when texts from one culture meet another? As scholars such Bassnett and Trivedi have suggested in their discussion of nineteenth-century colonial translation, the translations of the era are historically and politically located and promote the value(s) of European culture (1998, 6). According to Venuti, the relationship, however, is not one-directional, as the location of translation in the between culture can also be seen to open up spaces for resistance and hybridity (1998, 178).

This is also the basis of the view of Homi K. Bhabha, whose discussion of translation defines the concept less as a transmission of texts than as a more general aspect of his theory of hybridity. For Bhabha, translation is an effect of his Third Space, an interstitial site of liminality and in-betweenness creating qualitative changes and new identities, open to various migrants and diasporans inhabiting borders;

The migrant culture of the “in-between”, the minority position, dramatizes the activity of culture’s untranslatability; and in so doing, it moves the question of culture’s appropriation beyond the assimilationist’s dream, or the racist’s nightmare, of a “full transmissal of subject subject matter”; and toward an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture’s difference. (1994, 224)

Following Bhabha, post-colonial translation has been understood as a process transforming texts and identities. Bill Ashcroft has extended this argument and suggests that it is language as such that functions as Third Space in post-colonial texts: since language lacks “a simple correspondence between signs and referents,” reality cannot be simply translated into words but such an attempt remains “in the Third Space of enunciation in its provisionality and untranslatability” (2010, 161). For Ashcroft, this space is peculiar to post-colonial texts since their space is that of between cultures (2010, 161).

The construction of Asmaani’s identity in Shamsie’s novel is excessively linguistic. She is very sensitive to language, as seen in her frequent puns to the extent that she is indeed referred to by her father as a “scrabble girl” (178). Her sensitivity is also apparent in her comments on the linguistic behaviour of other characters, Ed in particular. Her dislike of his nickname is at the same time a critique of his Americanized identity. This can be seen when Ed introduces himself at the station as “Mir Adnan Akbar Khan [...] But my friends call me Ed,” he uses “mock-grandiose tones” and receives a sharp response of “Nicknames and friendship rarely go together” (9) from Asmaani; on another occasion the narrative underlines Ed’s use of “a Hollywood drawl” and is a further comment on his Americanized identity (191).

The importance of language to Asmaani is further shown that even before learning to read, she is attracted to language, and her colouring of a performance poster is described as if it were a way of mimicking writing: “I was young enough to regard the alphabet in terms of shape rather than sound, and I loved the way my hand curved into the bends of ‘S’ that appeared not just once but twice in Shehnaz Saeed’s name” (51). Her awareness of the ambivalence of language and the provisionality of meaning is evident when she discusses her response to the name chosen by her mother. As the following passage shows, she both comments critically on her mother’s political naming of her daughter and contrasts that with her stepmother’s explanation:

Aasmaani Inqalab – my first and middle names, self-important trisyllables that long ago pushed my shorter surname off everything except the most official documents. My mother’s choice, my name. My mother had made all the important choices regarding my early life; the only thing she left to Dad and Beema was the actual business of raising me. Aasmaani Inqalab: Celestial Revolution. Such a name never really admits the notion of childhood. But Beema used to whisper in my ear, ‘Azure.’ Aasmaani can also mean azure. An azure revolution. (3)

The two distinct names signify two aspects of Aasmaani’s identity: a bitter part remaining in the shadow of her disappeared mother is juxtaposed with the care and comfort provided by Beema. The novel further locates Aasmaani in the instability of language in an interesting manner: while it, by using the

trope of the dictionary, emphasises the importance of exact definitions and meanings instilled in her by the Poet and which is supported with the importance of the encyclopaedia for her current job as a quiz show researcher at the television station, the particular word, current, under investigation in the passage shows the impossibility of fixing the meaning:

I walked over to the boxes of books which surrounded the empty bookshelf in the living room, and opened the one marked 'REF.' On the top was the dictionary I'd had since I was a child. I closed my eyes, opened the book, and ran my fingers down the page. Opened my eyes. My finger was halfway done the definition of COMBUST. I flipped past CONTRA MUNDUM and CORUSCATE and CUMULAS until I reached CURRENT.

[...]

Currents. I knew something of them already.

I knew the currents of the oceans include the Agulhas, the Humboldt and the Benguela, I knew currents move in gyres, clockwise in the northern hemisphere and anticlockwise in the southern hemisphere. I knew the Poet had told me, years ago, that if we could only view the motion of currents as metaphors for the gyres of history – or the gyres of history as metaphors for the motion of currents – we'd know the absurdity of declaring the world is divided into East and West. I knew my mother's voice at the beach, cautioning me against undercurrents. (24)

As the passage shows, the undercurrents in the sea are dangerous and disruptive, and unsurprisingly language is defined in the novel by the Poet and his circle "as a living, dangerous entity" (61). In a similar vein, the sea (of language) in the novel is a dangerous element haunting the protagonist throughout the novel as the likely site of her mother's suicide – an unexpected loss of her fixed identity as mother. While the opening chapter reports of a dream in which Asmaani fails in saving a mermaid on the beach, the final chapter shows her writing her mother's name in the sand and then taking the sand to the sea, accepting her loss. At the same time she lets go of her fixed construction of her mother, shown here in the way how the letters signifying her dissolve and are taken away by an undercurrent:

I take the block of sand in my palms and walk forward until I am knee-deep in the cold, clear water. The bright winter sun throws a net of silver between the horizon and me. I bend my back and lower my cupped hands just below the surface of sea. Her name and the sand stream out between my fingers, dissolve into the waves, and are carried away. (338)

The instability of language is linked with the problem of translation. Shamsie's novel shows various uses of the idea of translation ranging from linguistic ones as use of untranslated words and distrust in language to cultural and symbolic ones. As a post-colonial text, Shamsie's novel uses untranslated words to signify cultural practices and objects with no equivalent in English. These include, for instance, terms referring to clothing (dupata [4], shalwar-kameez [4], kurta-shalwar [205]), dishes (pakora [11], biryani [42], seekh kabab [186], jalaibee [161], haandi chicken [266], chapli kabab [266], daal [266], raita [266] and practices of eating (iftar [43], sehri [161]), and religious, political, and

aesthetic terminology (eid [193], jirga [171], maulana [283], ummah [285], qafia [199], radif [197], qhazal [199]). Their effect is to provide a sense of cultural difference (and a related sense of the exotic) and to emphasise the gap between the reader and the text (see Ashcroft 2010, 176-7). As Joel Kuortti has suggested, such a decision not to italicize non-English elements in a post-colonial text seeks to equate the writer's (here Pakistani) and the intended reader's (here Anglo-American) cultures with each other (2009, 4). This strategy, however, creates a sense of foreignness in the text, which is further emphasised in the novel by incorporating (twice) an Arabic phrase from Surah al-Rahman in the text: "a line [...] beloved of calligraphers for its variedness and its balance" (5).

In addition to locating the narrative in the context of Pakistan, foreign words and expressions are found elsewhere in the novel where they have a slightly different function. For instance, the problem of finding a suitable expression is discussed in a reported 1982 interview with the famous actor Shehnaz Saeed, an old friend of Asmaani's mother, who is shown to comment on her performance in an Urdu-speaking production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* at a festival in Italy. While the journalist – who has no command of Urdu – suggests that the Italian word "*sprezzatura*. The illusion of ease with which the most gifted artistes [sic] imbue their most complex performances" (32) is apt to describe the performance and inquires whether she is able to name performers with similar qualities, Shehnaz Saeed responds by using another Italian phrase to describe one of Samina Akram's public speeches:

A: I can think of a number of actors. But, correct me if I'm wrong, there's an Italian word which is applied to performances with are a level above mere *sprezzatura*.

Q: You mean *grazia*. I have to say, I'm impressed.

A: Yes, *grazia*. Divine grace. The feeling that something out of this world is happening through the performer. You can admire *sprezzatura*, but in the presence of *grazia* you feel actually honoured, you feel you've changed. You've glimpsed something of the immortal mysteries. (32)

What is significant here is that the novel links performance with transformation, defining its effect as a translation of self and an "immortal mystery." In so doing it shows that translation is both linguistic, explaining the meaning of the concept in English, and cultural, an effect of an encounter. This is what Jenny S. Spencer, drawing on Judith Butler's comments on cultural translation, suggests when she writes that "the subject is both constituted and transformed in the moment of contact that both solicits, and offers, recognition of others. Without translation, a transformative encounter with otherness cannot occur" (2007, 391). While the Italian critic, lacking knowledge of Urdu, remains at the level of *Sprezzatura*, the crowd united by Samina Akram is transformed. However, this is not merely an effect of language but rather one linked with the mystical moment of coming together in the encounter, being recognized as and translated into a member of a political community in the way suggested by Butler: "To ask for recognition [...] is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other" (2003, 31). Asmaani, however, unable to accept her mother's death, considers herself abandoned and repeatedly rejected by her, as seen on several occasions including her interpretation of the meeting reported by Shehnaz Saeed above: "That was my mother's greatest cruelty. She allowed you enough time to luxuriate in her *grazia*, and she went away, leaving you with the

knowledge that you would never feel anything like it again and you would certainly not produce it yourself” (33). If read in the context of the Butler’s idea that mourning is not merely individual, but as members of community we are always “*beside ourselves*” (2003, 14; italics original), Asmaani’s inability to mourn her death and idea of herself as “a victim of my [her] mother’s lack of love” (331) is based on her sense of autonomy and rejection of entering the community her mother stands for as a feminist icon.

The role of language and translation remains, however, ambivalent in the novel regardless of its focus on writing and writers. Language, however, is represented as a less reliable mode of communication and knowledge than music. As Asmaani puts it, “it was knowledge in the form of sensation [...] How could I say it, I cannot speak of it? It demands music, not language” (177). This idea is also evident in the following passage where the Poet’s love of classical opera is framed in his view suggesting that incomprehension of language allows for pleasure:

Here, here, he’d say, listen, and he’d make me sit through as much as I could bear of *Carmen*, *The Ring Cycle*, *Otello*, *Madama Butterfly*, or whatever it was that he was listening to at the end of a session of writing. But what do the words mean, I would demand, and he’d shake his head. Never learn Italian, he warned me. Why do you think I prefer opera to qawaali? They both have the same degree of passion, but with qawaali I understand the words and that ruins it. As long as you don’t understand the words of opera you can believe they match the sublime quality of the music, you can believe words are as capable as music of echoing and creating feeling, and you need only search hard enough, long enough, for the right combinations to create that perfection. Before the babble of Babel, Asmaani, people spoke music. (177)

As the speaker is a renowned Poet, this distrust in language and translation needs further commentary. It could be suggested that it is based on a deconstructive view emphasising the slippery character of language and the related impossibility of fixing the meaning. It is also linked with the openness of language to ideological misuse by politicians and military leaders whose propaganda produces alternative meanings that are to be resisted. The latter is described when Asmaani comments on two different ways of responding to the death of the Poet and his status:

He had been killed, so the story went, by a government agency which feared the combination of his national popularity and international reputation – although the military government in power at the time countered those claims by declaring a national day of mourning for that “flower of our soil.” All over the country anti-government groups of every hue boycotted the government’s day of mourning and announced their own day of mourning (on the same day) for that “voice of resistance.” (37)

The actual task of translation is present in the novel in the letters sent to Shehnaz Saeed from various places with no sender’s name. What first appears as “some foreign language” suddenly turns into something else when Asmaani remembers the code devised by her mother and the Poet to enable



communicate during the latter's incarceration. The shock in her response derives from the fact that she has never come to terms with their deaths in suspicious circumstances:

I turned. My feet were heavy lifting themselves off the bare floor and my body sluggish in the response.

I reached the paper, lifted it up.

Ijc Anonkoh efac fyfno ikrfb.

The letters stepped out of their disguises – haltingly at first, but then all in a rush and swirl of abandon – and transformed into words:

The Minions came again today. (35)

As the letters allegedly originating from the Poet held hostage in an unknown location, while false and finally revealed to have been written by Ed, appear to contain knowledge inaccessible to others and thus generate hope that they would be alive, Asmaani becomes obsessed with them and uses them to support her belief in their being alive. The following passage reveals her attempt to retrace the Poet's language and mind, to reconnect with the unmourned past and not let it go:

I picked up a felt-tip pen, and traced the twirling letter on to the overlying paper. It took much longer than I would have thought to follow every line and loop of that intricate hand. I began to feel as though I were replicating an abstract painting, each stroke of my nib inscribing my inability to understand how a mind could conceive of those shapes and combinations. What was I hoping for as my pen moved in and out of curlicues? That the act of tracing would bring me closer to whoever wrote these sentences, allow me to slip between the words and understand the mind that placed them on the page? (36)

Unlike in many post-colonial transfiction, the main function of translation in Shamsie's novel is not to remap identity in the conditions of diaspora and dislocation. As its emphasis is on Asmaani's translation of the coded letters for personal reasons rather than the space between cultures, the trope of translation is deployed as means of bridging the different parts/sites of its protagonist's self with the aim of working through her family trauma, a narrative strategy that Shamsie has utilized in her earlier novels (see Nyman 2009). The need to resolve the past is evident in both Asmaani's inability to mourn the deaths of her mother and the Poet – the bond between Asmaani and the Poet has been particularly strong as since childhood she has identified with him by calling him Omi, i.e., "Old Me" (40). Similarly, her internalized sense of her mother's rejection is constantly represented in the novel in her self-questioning taking the form of quiz show questions:

*Who, or what, would I need to be to make her stay this time?*

- a) *member of parliament*
- b) *apolitical quiz show researcher*
- c) *capitalist corporate girl*

- d) *translator of obscure Urdu diaries by day, party animal by night*  
*Answer: this is a trick question. All depends on who she is now. (187)*

This issue can be discussed in the context of what Rey Chow (2008) refers to as the melancholy turn in cultural translation. Basing her argument on Judith Butler's and Anne Cheng's work on melancholia as the normative identity's mourning over what is culturally denied from it, Chow suggests that such a view

makes it possible to hold onto the notion of a certain original condition (language, literacy, culture) while advancing the plait that this original condition has been compromised, injured, incapacitated, interrupted, or stolen – in a word, lost. This twin rhetorical move of essentializing-cum-deconstruction, asserting paradoxically both the existence of an original and its irrevocable loss, both as a lost object and its continued spectral presence leads to an inexhaustible theoretical productiveness. (2008, 572-3)

This idea of mourning as translation and transformation is present on various occasions in Shamsie's novel. One example concerns its representation of the Poet's narrative poem Laila in which Laila loses her lover Qais and desperately searches for him. As all attempts to discover Qais fail, Laila translates herself into her lover and "starts to adopt his manner of speech, his gait, his dress, his expressions in order to keep his characteristics alive" (49). In so doing she, while mourning her love, also performs both the lost original and keeps it alive in the presence. Chow suggests that a potential way for the translator-cum-melancholy mourner to recover the past is to "*go native* – to restore to such a native or original condition [...] its unfinished life experiences" (2008, 573; italics original). In the case of colonialism, Chow suggests that the critique of the representation of "the native original as barbarism" may reconstruct the translator not as a traitor (e.g., Malinche) but as a "faithful melancholic" (2008, 573). Melancholia, it is suggested, is a "form of affirmative cultural redress and repair" (2008, 574).

Not only is Asmaani's problematic relationship with loss and mourning emphasised in the novel but it is intertwined with her role as a translator – what the translation brings to life is the spectral voice of the poet as articulated in the present: "Samina, are you even still alive?" (262) and "If someone is reading this, it must be you" (111). Through reading and translating the letters revealing intimate memories of the love between the Poet and Samina, Asmaani, to use Chow's terms, enters a process of "moral striving for justice" (2008, 573) and tries to find out more about the deaths and whether they have really happened by examining written accounts and first-hand reports and visiting archives. Yet the spectral voice, the alleged original, appears to be a fake one, created by Ed on the basis of the Poet's letters to the South American writer Rafael Gonzales:

The Poet wrote to him about everything. Poetry, politics, food, childhood, your mother – always your mother. It was one of those friendships between men. [...] Every sentence construction, every literary allusion, every shift in tone that you read in those encrypted letters is in here. I took the content of one sentence, forced it into the structure of another. Took a story your mother told me,

transposed it onto the stories he told Rafael [...] All I did was imitate him. The distinctiveness of his voice was what made it easy. That, and your desire to believe. (318)

As a result Asmaani's fantasies collide with the reality, forcing her to realize the truth. Upon recognizing that the military murdered the poet and that her mother committed suicide, she can finally mourn for them. At same time, however, she is allowed to perform what Chow refers to as "second-order mourning" (2008, 573) or what Butler (2003) discusses as collective mourning: this mourning hitherto impossible for her is for the loss of a Pakistani political community based on democracy and equality, replaced with a nation of violence, fundamentalism, paranoia, and corruption. The deaths of the Poet and her mother are markers in the cultural memory of Pakistan, and her mourning for them as such will relocate her anew by translating her into a new self. In sum, the role of translation in Shamsie's novel is to assist its protagonist's transition from an individual self troubled with unmourned loss towards an understanding of the loss in a more relational manner.

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### **Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanism: Language and Transculturalism in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke***

The first two novels in Amitav Ghosh's projected Ibis Trilogy, *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011) are intricately concerned with issues of Words and Worlds. *Sea of Poppies* opens in the North of India and Bay of Bengal 1838 at the eve of the Opium Wars and many of the central characters are deeply involved in the cultivation and trade in opium poppies, orchestrated by the British East India Company. The first novel is mainly set on board the Ibis, once a slave ship which now carries convicts and indentured labourers from Calcutta to Mauritius but which also ends up as a place of refuge for persons who for different reasons find themselves in need of new beginnings. The crew consists of lascars under the leadership of Serang Ali and they "came from places that were far apart, and had nothing in common except the Indian Ocean" (12 – 13). The communication on board the ship is to a large extent determined by these lascars but all characters bring their own variety of the English language onto the ship and it is this "polyglot jargon" that the reader encounters in the conversation and translation between the characters. One incident concerns the burial of the ship's captain and here Zachary Reid, originally a freed slave from Baltimore, performs the funeral rites:

When the body was tipped into the sea it was Zachary who read from the Bible. He did it in a voice that was sonorous enough to earn a compliment from Serang Ali: 'Malum Zikri number-one joss-pijjin bugger. Church- song why no sing?'  
'No can do,' said Zachary. 'Ain could never sing.'  
'Nebba mind.' Said Serang Ali. 'one-piece song-bugger hab got.' He beckoned to a tall, spidery ship's- boy called Rajoo. 'This launder blongi one-time Mission-boy. Joss-man hab learn him one-piece saam.'  
'Psalm?' said Zachary, in surprise. 'Which one?'  
As if in answer, the young lascar began to sing: 'Why *do* the heathen so furious-ly rage together...?' "  
In case the meaning of this had escaped Zachary, the serang considerably provided a translation. 'That mean,' he whispered into Zachary's ear, 'for what heathen-bugger makee so much bobbery? Other works no hab got?'  
Zachary sighed: 'Guess that just about sums it all up.' (22)

In contrast to several other passages in the novel, which are rendered entirely in pidgin, this passage is concerned with the issue of translation but treats it ironically and not in a sense that the reader would find helpful. Words and phrases which remain difficult to decipher are explained in an addendum to the novel, named the Ibis Chrestomathy. Here we can look up the prefix "joss", as in "joss-pijjin" and "joss-man" and find the following explanation:

+ **joss**: “ It was in Macao that I learnt the correct etymology of this term, which derives not from a Cantonese root, as I had imagined, but from the Portuguese *Dios*. Hence its use in all matters pertaining to worship: **Joss-stick**, **joss-house**, **joss-candle**, and of course **joss-pijjin** meaning ‘religion’ (from which derives the usage **joss-pijjin-man** to mean priest). (The Ibis Chrestomathy 24)

The Ibis Chrestomathy is connected to the novels through an introduction which explains that it was compiled by one of the characters, the Raja Neel Hattan Halder, who finds himself on the Ibis as a convict to be transported to a penal settlement on Mauritius. Ghosh’s use of nineteenth-century linguistic scholarship and dictionaries, such as the *Hobson-Jobson* and a *Laskari Dictionary* and *An English and Hindostanee Naval Dictionary of Technical Terms* is here brought into the very structure of the novel itself.

*Sea of Poppies* ends with a storm which enables five men to escape, among them Neel. *River of Smoke* tells the story of these men but focuses on the lives of opium dealers in Canton. Neel finds employment as the secretary of the main character of this novel, the Parsi opium dealer Bahram. *River of Smoke* abandons the language of the Chrestomathy and uses Standard English, except in some instances where Pidgin English is used for conversation among the characters. This change is significant because it marks a departure from ideas of language and communication as changing and evolving from a variety of sources towards uniformity and standardisation.

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This paper addresses the *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* as part of a larger project, where I study representations of transculturalism in the Indian Ocean World. In this project I focus primarily on literary portrayals of slavery and freedom and I follow the work of historians, such as Gwyn Campbell, on slavery in the Indian Ocean World. The characters in *Sea of Poppies* can be said to represent Indian Ocean transnationalism in the way that their patterns of migration allow them to move from one social position to another and the way in which freedom is never seen as an individualistic enterprise. In the case of the Raja Neel Hattan Halder it is a movement of dispossession and dislocation but for the majority of the characters this dislocation is a transition to entitlement and empowerment. What is also significant is that the Ibis allows the characters to move from their previous positions in ways which radically alters and challenges all established conventions and distinctions: The orphaned Paulette enters the ship disguised as a man; the freedman Zachary Reid passes for a white person and is therefore able to take charge of the ship; Deeti escapes her husband’s funeral pyre and changes her name together with her daughter. Officially the Ibis carries convicts and opium but most importantly it is a manifestation of a particular way of transnational movement which has its roots in Indian Ocean patterns of slavery and freedom.

Gwyn Campbell has identified a number of important characteristics for the migration of unfree labour across the Indian Ocean in opposition to the slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean. The Indian

Ocean slave trade was multidirectional and changed over time; it was dominated by indigenous agents rather than European finance and most Indian Ocean World slaves were female. While slaves brought across the Atlantic were defined as chattel and destined for plantations, the societies of the Indian Ocean World had a number of different terms for slaves. According to Campbell, the slaves were destined for varying work conditions and tasks,

From early times female slaves worked as concubines, entertainers, prostitutes and domestic servants. They also laboured as water carriers, and in agriculture, textile production and mining. Male slaves were employed in a wide range of activities, from agricultural labour, to craftwork, commerce, transport, fishing, domestic service, stewardship, bureaucratic service, soldiering and diplomacy. (“Slavery” xi)

The cause for enslavement in the Indian Ocean World varied and often involved pawnship and hereditary indebtedness and the acquisition of slaves was not necessarily linked to a particular need for the services of the slaves or to economic benefits. In this manner slaves were seen as commodities in wealthy household without an immediate economic use as in the Atlantic world.

The slave – free divide, which in the Atlantic world interacted with the production of ‘race’ was much less clear-cut in the case of Indian Ocean slavery. Campbell points to the many varieties of unfree labour which developed within the societies of the Indian Ocean World and stresses the fact that some slaves held positions of power and prestige which “made them the envy of ordinary non-slaves” (“Slavery” xi). The social barriers which came about as a result of the strict slave –free divide in the Atlantic World were much less distinct in slave societies of the Indian Ocean world and the assimilation of slaves into slaveholding households included both religious, cultural and linguistic assimilation. As a direct consequence of this lack of clear cut social divisions, slaves did not necessarily develop a class consciousness and identify themselves as slaves with the aim of abolition but were more inclined to “secure a niche within the dominant society” (“Slavery” xxii). While the question of emancipation and manumission depended on particular definitions of individual freedom based on the ideals of European liberalism, Indian Ocean slavery evolved in entirely different contexts within complex systems of dependency and obligations encompassing all members of society. Campbell’s definition of the context of Indian Ocean slavery is particularly important when it comes to understanding relations among slaves and the question of assimilation:

Conventional Western concepts of ‘slave’ and ‘free’ are not particularly helpful tools of historical analysis in most of the IOW. The concept of ‘slavery’ was highly time- and culture-specific, often embracing or overlapping with other forms of unfree labour. Moreover, the idea of an abstract form of liberty, in the form of a community composed of individuals equal before the law and governed by market rules of supply and demand, was inconceivable in most IOW societies. Such liberty would deprive the individual of a social network, patronage and protection, rendering him/her utterly vulnerable to human and natural hazards. (“Slavery” xxvi)

As Isabel Hofmeyer points out, this work on the Indian Ocean World raises important questions about how patterns of migration and the various positions of power and subordination came to be defined through the static, racially informed opposition between settler and slave. According to Hofmeyer, these racialised distinctions developed within a frame of transnationalism dominated by the paradigm of the Black Atlantic. In Paul Gilroy's influential book *The Black Atlantic* black diasporic identities are seen as constituted through the triangular relation between the continents of Africa, Europe and America. Whereas Gilroy's focus is on the connection between the slave trade on the development of modernity and his argument is directed against black nationalism, the paradigm of the black Atlantic has been articulated in different forms by authors and critics on all three continents and has, in Hofmeyer's words come to encompass "the Atlantic seaboard as the site for the emergence of capitalist modernity as a transnational system" (4). In posing the Indian Ocean World in opposition to the black Atlantic Hofmeyer identifies the theme of People and Passages as one of the areas in Indian Ocean historiography which has the potential to challenge such dominant ideas of transcultural migration. Her questions: Who is a slave? Who is a settler? raise further questions about how archival sources identifying individual slaves are interpreted in literary works.

My study focuses on how present-day literary renditions of the history of the Indian Ocean World articulate the interconnectedness between the two paradigms, often in ways where the Atlantic paradigm is superimposed upon the Indian Ocean paradigm. Whereas *Sea of Poppies* can be said to represent Indian Ocean patterns of migration, *River of Smoke* represents a new phase where racialised issues of origin and national belonging are given new significance. This novel depicts the events which lead up to the Opium Wars and focuses on the process whereby Bahram discovers that the majority of opium traders, because of their British nationality, are now in a position to challenge the Chinese authorities and still be on the winning side, a process which excludes him and eventually leads to his ruin. The novel thus depicts a new form of transnational migration, a paradigmatic shift where issues of national and ethnic belonging are central. The introduction to the *Ibis Chrestomathy* also marks this shift through references to the *Oxford English Dictionary* which, in Neel's view, would complete his own work. Neel followed the destiny of words and was concerned with charting the shifts and development:

The **Chrestomathy** then, is not so much a key to language as an astrological chart, crafted by a man who was obsessed with the destiny of words. Not all words were of equal interest of course and the **Chrestomathy**, let it be noted, deals only with a favoured few: it is devoted to a select number among the many migrants who have sailed from eastern waters towards the chilly shores of the English language. (1)

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### **The Discomfortable Read: Literary Otherness and Transculturation in J. M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country***<sup>33</sup>

In this brief paper (a work in progress) I will relate to a few issues concerning the following of the suggested nodes: “In what ways do the language(s) of transcultural texts construct cultural and national identities in various multilingual contexts?”

*In the Heart of the Country* (1977) evokes not only “the Heart of” colonial and apartheid South Africa but eventually also paradoxical abstractions to e.g. “the heart of nowhere” (IHC 82, 120),<sup>34</sup> or “Countries of the Mind”.<sup>35</sup> The novel was produced during a time when the apartheid government faced increasing resistance within the country as well as various initiatives of international isolation, and it was published the year following the Soweto Uprising. However, the novel disrupts direct allegorical readings of its historical and political context, even though it does expose much of its theoretical and aesthetic frames (which of course cannot be ideologically neutral). It suggests an uncertain, or shifting, temporal setting; while it resembles the late colonial, the narrator for instance says “if that is the century I am in” (69); later she talks of “skipping years in a flash” (135). The narrator indicates familiarity with, and challenges to, surrealism, psychoanalysis and feminism, to name only a few theoretical prisms; she is a “poetess of interiority” (38) talking, “confessing,” incessantly and erratically. Although not directly the focus following here, the novel, and the prisms of course too, have their histories and politics.<sup>36</sup>

The experience of reading the novel is arguably strange and at times quite disturbing. Ambiguity and ambivalence describe the process of trying to “make sense” of the novel as well as issues which the novel deals with. The linguistic, aesthetic strategies of exposing and potentially disrupting discourse and ideology, are central to its form and thus possibly also to its effect. This presents a challenge of defining this reading precisely, due for instance to its metafictional insistence on the unreliability of words; their relations to referents; its exemplification of the provisional character of language and knowledge and thereby also the seemingly divergent, contradictory interpretational possibilities – the arbitrariness of interpretations. Consider for instance “the tentativeness with which I hold my memories” (135), the almost 150 times the word “perhaps” is used, the numerous “or[s],” or the narrative reversions and then diversions; the exposure and (then) questionings of the novel’s own authority. This paper’s title and attention given to the experience of reading the novel is in part inspired by Attridge’s (2004a)<sup>37</sup> take on the “ethics of reading” literature as an event (and my presumption that reading a novel may constitute instances of transculturation on the part of the reader – between the reader and text, potentially

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<sup>33</sup> Thanks to Lene, Amrita, and Stuart for valuable feedback on such short notice – the text would’ve been twice as chaotic without your comments.

<sup>34</sup> Quotes from the 1999, Vintage edition of *IHC* (1977).

<sup>35</sup> “Countries of Mind” title (only), from Penner, Dick (1989).

<sup>36</sup> See May (2001) on Coetzee and “Questions of the Body” and Briganti (1994) on “The Politics of Hysteria” for readings of *IHC* and surrealism, psychoanalysis and feminism respectively.

<sup>37</sup> Attridge, Derek (2004a): *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*.

contributing to new experiences, or shifts in understanding, of (the novel's) aesthetic identity.<sup>38</sup> These latter presumptions however are preliminary questions for my MA-work, only circuitously begun here).

The sense of discomfort is in part due to dismal often explicit descriptions of violence, self-hatred, combining bleak humour and a persistent verging towards nihilism, in addition to the novel's structure in small fragments and the persistence of ambiguity and ambivalence. At times the descriptions are initially humorous, then certainly not (or vice versa), at other times simultaneously humorous and unmistakably serious. A difficult example of this discomfort might be the narrator Magda's claims that "I look like the popular notion of the barren woman" (IHC 46) (which, taken out of context, I almost feel guilty for having smiled at); "Is there something in me that loves the gloomy, the hideous, the doom-ridden, that sniffs out its nest and snuggles down in a dark corner among rats' droppings and chicken-bones rather than resign itself to decency" (25). Consider moreover the scene of axe murder (14; 16), the scene(s) of rape (113-7) where rape is described several times, though slightly differently each time. In the event of reading or imagining these scenes, the question of fact or fabrication may not seem pertinent, either not at first, or not at all, as the overwhelming discomfort of repeated versions of violations subordinate reason to sympathy. Even though, as Attridge (2004b)<sup>39</sup> points out, the scenes of rape, from section 205, constitute a "narrative paradox. It is as if the capacity of mimetic writing to overcome the metafictional apparatus is being demonstrated, though we are not likely to be aware of it in these terms at the time of reading" (666). The sense of discomfort and sympathy, often through visceral descriptions, lingers on more evidently than the recognition of the narrative device – even though it may serve to "rupture" the initial readerly "involvement" (Ibid.). This creates distance, ambiguity and ambivalence, yet conviction of the seriousness of it all remains, whatever "really" is going on. This, at times paradoxical, tension between form and effect (or affect) we might also relate to the strategy of explicitly numbering the 266 paragraphs/sections which constitute the novel, evoking law, for one, but not order. "This simple device," Attridge notes,

announces from the outset that we are not to suspend disbelief as we read, that our encounter with human lives, thoughts, and feelings is to take place against the background of a constant awareness of their mediation by language, generic and other conventions, and artistic decisions (663).

In the very first section compositional devices are exposed, we are warned of the limits of perspective, the unreliability of Magda's (hi)story. Already by page 18, after she has given a detailed description of how she kills her father (sections 26-35), the unreliability is enhanced by the sudden reversion and diversion, which ruptures the prior violent "reality" we were led into when she in section 36 says that "he does not die so easily after all" (and that is only the first attempt at, or imagining of, parricide). Later Magda confesses: "I make it all up in order that it shall make me up" (79), and earlier, "I fight against

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<sup>38</sup> This wording (aesthetic identity) is inspired by my supervisor S. Sillars.

<sup>39</sup>Attridge, Derek (2004b): "Ethical Modernism: Servants as Others in J. M. Coetzee's Early Fiction" (a slightly different version of chapter 1 in (2004a).)

becoming one of the forgotten ones of history. I am a spinster with a locked diary but I am more than that. I am an uneasy consciousness but I am more than that, too” (4).

According to James Clifford, “‘identity is conjunctural, not essential’. Identity and culture are not discrete entities, but relationships, intersections. ‘Cultural’ difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness; self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than of essence” (in Rogers, 2006, 492).<sup>40</sup> This fits in with both formal and ideological constituents of the novel’s aesthetics, and Magda’s identifications. As indicated by her rhetoric and self-other relations, Magda is both colonizer and colonized. She therefore risks perpetuating what she seeks to subvert. Her options and her realities/stories, depend on her specific (but fictionally unspecific) *place* (e.g. geographical and social) and on prior discourses, both outside and inside the text. At the same time such determinants are manipulated or pushed to their limits (of realism?). Although Magda’s discourse is fettered by the authoritative – patriarchal and colonial, it also disrupts these, by rewriting/re-uttering or revisi(oni)ng them with a critical difference, or critical distance, in “new,” changed or changing contexts.<sup>41</sup> These strategies, and potential effects, I will label *disruptive revisions*. That is, these both expose and question the power of language and authority (authorial too), and contribute to challenging the basis of clear-cut or stable identities and interpretations, thus disrupting “the ways transcultural texts construct cultural and national identities.” Rather, through textual strategies, both the novel’s aesthetic self-reflexive identity and the narrator’s identity through self-characterizations, illustrate processual, discursive identifications, oscillating between dichotomies and between limits and potentials in a manner which seems to result in slightly more *space*, within the restraints of her place. This image of unspecified space (more subjective), appropriating but depending on a specified place (more “objective,” with a minimum of recognisability), may be relatable not only to the symbolic action, through the imagination, of Magda’s story, but also to formal and ideological creativity and potential effects. Thus we might compare place to word/discourse/identity or aesthetic device etc. The images of space/place and disruptive revisions then are subversive devices, potentially opening up for “new,” changed uses, interpretations, and challenging authority or objectivity.<sup>42</sup>

“To my father I have been an absence all my life. Therefore instead of being the womanly warmth at the heart of this house I have been a zero, null, a vacuum towards which all collapses inward...” (IHC 2). Not only is she an absence to her father, but she to him (40), and significantly it is the mother that remains most (un)clearly absent in this story. The father, “archetypical head of the Boer household” (Poyner 2009, 46),<sup>43</sup> the Afrikaner ideal “wife and mother” and the Victorian gentle, loving, Angel of the House (IHC 2, 5) are tropes Magda violently challenges (at least discursively/imaginatively). Poyner claims that “Coetzee distances himself from colonialist and Afrikaner nationalist discourse by portraying a character *en abyme*, laying bare the processes by which she is written. She is a character who, as insane *and* unreliable, is a paltry representative of the ‘great colonizing mission’” (45).<sup>44</sup> In my opinion, the novel’s explication of dominance, inequality, both gender and racial, and

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<sup>40</sup> Rogers, Richard (2006): “From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation.”

<sup>41</sup> Thus resembling *parody* as defined by Hutcheon, Linda (1985/2000): *A Theory of Parody*.

<sup>42</sup> Partly inspired by Turner, Cathy (2004): “Palimpsest or Potential Space”

<sup>43</sup> Poyner, Jane (2009): *J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship*

<sup>44</sup> Describing Magda as “insane” is of course, and importantly, debatable.

especially, the lack of reciprocity, are central to questions of transculturation. Attwell (2006)<sup>45</sup> states that transculturation “suggests multiple processes, a dialogue in both directions and, most importantly, processes of cultural destruction followed by reconstruction on entirely new terms” (18). Consider this in light of Clifford’s view above, as well as, in general, the novel’s explication of language and power, identities and otherness, and finally (the lack of) reciprocity as mentioned, and more specifically the following passage:

Perhaps ... I am a conserver rather than a destroyer, perhaps my rage at my father is simply rage at the violations, of the old language, the correct language, that take place when he exchanges kisses and the pronouns of intimacy with a girl who yesterday scrubbed the floors and today ought to be cleaning the windows (IHC 47).

As mentioned, Magda risk perpetuating what she seeks to subvert (this may be the case for Coetzee too), the language demonstrated seems self-consciously aware of this. These words then point to both limits and potentials, which are further complicated by Magda’s relativity, her ironic, rhetorical emphasis of e.g.: “Does that not explain everything?” (5), followed by: “To explain is to forgive, to be explained is to be forgiven, but I, I hope and fear, am inexplicable, unforgivable” (6). And towards the very last lines of the novel, this ambiguity remains. That is, it remains in the prevalence of identification through linguistic choice, although still (inferred) ironically: “I have uttered my life in my own voice throughout;” “I have chosen at every moment my own destiny” (151). So while Magda has achieved a certain degree of symbolic disempowerment of her father and subversion of the “old... correct language,” of patriarchy and colonialism, she has evidently, importantly, not achieved “words of true exchange” (110) with her “others”, the servants (nor her father for that matter). Nevertheless, Attwell’s definition (above) relates well to Magda’s continuous “destruction” and “reconstruction” of her identities, throughout, and the potential space this may achieve within the rigours of place (or the rigours of “language;” its grammar; discourse; or aesthetic devices etc.), and, potentially, raising readerly awareness.

Since it is language that has played a major role in producing (and simultaneously occluding) the other, it is in language—language aware of its ideological effects, alert to its own capacity to impose silence as it speaks—that the force of the other can be most strongly represented. The effect is one that I would want to describe as textual otherness, or textualterity: a verbal artifact that estranges as it entices, that foregrounds the Symbolic as it exploits the Imaginary, that speaks while it says that it must remain silent—and in so doing stages the ethical as an event (Attridge 2004b, 669).

To conclude (tentatively), this final quote presents a telling description of e.g. the reciprocal oppression of the (self-other) relations exemplified in/by the novel, and of discursive, disruptive revisions – with differences; Magda’s space within her place. These exemplify how ideological

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<sup>45</sup> Attwell, David (2006): *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History*.

otherness and cultural otherness, constituted through textually self-conscious otherness, are exposed and destabilized – yet signaling what we cannot know. The formal strategies, too, demonstrate the oscillation between the binds to prior forms (plural, of course), repeating them eclectically in slightly different, “new” ways – with shifted (or shifting) implications. In turn these contribute to a challenging, uncomfortable but positively provoking read, which potentially constitutes a “transcultural text,” insofar as it exposes and challenges the reader’s perceptions of its theoretical/cultural/aesthetic premises.

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### **Distance and Intimacy on a Transcultural Stage: Letters from India**

I'll start with a quote from a letter probably from the late 1850s, sent from India:

[...] they came on, entered our compound and began their wild dancing close to us – a curious sight it was, a motley group, but, alas, one calculated deeply to impress one with the dark state in which these poor wretches live, I looked and looked again at first thinking I must be wrong as I saw swarthy faces among the dancers whom I knew – and knew not to be Musselmen – Coonbees, Mahars, and – was it really true – yes, actually there was our village Carpenter as Brahmin priest, the sacred thread even now dancing about in the torchlight as its owner turned and twisted in the mas[s]es of the dance. What a pitiful sight it seemed, that they should / all mix in this wild festival although professing to look upon the Prophet and his followers as – dogs and son of dogs.... I was still more astonished by seeing my Portugese (and Catholic) tailor trow [throw] himself into the midst of the circle and execute a sailors double shuffle to greatest delight of the bystanders but to our Butlers (also a Portugese) horror and dismay, the tailor we found afterwards was drunk as a fiddler so in some measure he was excused, still it did seem dreadful his joining in the wild revel. Next day we witnessed the Tabots being thrown into the water and gave all the villagers / a scramble for half pence, it was very amusing to see young and old scampering about and running after John and the money with wild cries, like a lot of big children although most of them were old men.

This letter is written by Ingeborg Stephens, who was born in 1839 in Stockholm and moved to Copenhagen in 1851. Not much is known about her education or about her life. Ingeborg's father, George Stephens, was a scholar (lacking a degree) in Scandinavian languages and literatures.

Some of Ingeborg's letters that her brother Joseph sent home from India when he left in 1869 were found in a chest a couple of years ago and they are today part of a larger archive connected to the manor Joseph bought on his return to Sweden. The Indian part of this archive, the documents actually found in the chest, has so far no absolutely settled borders. Letters that were sent during the Indian period (1859-1869) and some years before and after have been added to the archive. And a couple of new diaries were found recently.

The letter collection is incomplete in the meaning that not all letters are preserved. Regarding Ingeborg, there are many letters saved from her, but none *to* her. Whether she collected them is unknown. It seems that Ingeborg's letters would not have survived except in private memoirs if the male members of the family had not collected them, or some of them.

That the letters and other documents survived at all probably depended on his, at the time important and well-known father, and on their placement in one of the great manors in the South of

Sweden. Father, as well as son were dedicated collectors. Ingeborg was a peripheral member of the family. She did not have any heirs.

She married John Hallen Abbot in 1856. They left for India in February or March 1857 and in the beginning of April they moved to the region outside Bombay.<sup>46</sup> John was involved in railway construction on the Bombay – Nagpur (– Calcutta) line, made a career and stayed in India all his life. Ingeborg spent her time in India either following her husband to different places, sometimes camping before houses were built, or in Bombay. She wrote letters to her family, especially to her brother Joseph, who came to India and the railway a couple of years later.

Ingeborg's letters are placed either in Joseph Stephens separate Indian archive or in George's. Letters in both archives are organised under the names of the male members of the family, Ingeborg's letters as "Ingeborg Friis", her last name after her second husband. The letters were not private, since they were often read aloud, and collected and sent many at once. Ingeborg often summarized news from the letters she forwarded to Joseph. At the same time there is a recognizable voice in her letters, although of course bound by the conventions of the time.

I am going to deal with the languages that Ingeborg uses in her letters: English, a little Hindustani, Danish and Swedish, and their different functions. The family communicated in English. The reasons are obvious: the parents were English, as was Ingeborg's husband, and the language in India for them was English. Both Ingeborg and her brother Joseph wrote to each other in English all their life, although they lived in Scandinavia most of the time. In his letters to his son, George anxiously comments and corrects Joseph's English. A notion of the ideal of pure English is obvious. There are some corrections made in the letters that Ingeborg sent to Joseph and George. These may be made by herself or by her husband John – or by the receiver.

Now to the quote in the introduction. The first part of this letter is written in a traditional way on the lines of the paper, the second part is written across the first. This makes it difficult to read sometimes. The letter is directed to George but the first part of it is missing, and this means that it is undated. But it seems possible to connect it to a letter written to Joseph in September 1857, before he went to India. In that letter, she writes about a similar festival as in this letter, but it seems to have happened at another place. The archive custodian has created an order, a finished wholeness of fragments from two different letters.<sup>47</sup>

It is obvious that Ingeborg *knows* several of the Indians coming to her compound, performing their dance and being paid in the last lines in a humbling way. She does not mention them by name; this happens nowhere in her letters. The tone is easy to recognize from the colonial discourse. Indians are understood as living in mental darkness. She separates them by referring to religion: Muslims and Hindus by the never translated or explained caste names Coonbee [Kunbi] and Mahar, and Christians. The two groups of Hindus both belonged to the lower strata of the caste hierarchy in the Nassick [Nashik] area; the Mahars often worked on the railway or in the ammunition factories during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By Portuguese, she probably means Goan, since Goa was a Portuguese colony from the 16<sup>th</sup> century up to 1961. This categorizing might indicate that as a European she is trying to keep or impose

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<sup>46</sup> Third of April, to George 18.4.57.

<sup>47</sup> To George, probably written during the period 1857-1859, but placed on the wrong date 3.3.62.

an order that is not as strict among the Indians themselves in this village, or that they have the order but transgress it at specific occasions. She does not understand this and is indignant at the mixing of people belonging to different castes and religions during the festival. She interprets it as hypocrisy. If Coonbees do not fit into the categories then other classifications might be threatened as well. Such a situation creates an experience of tension which is noticeable in the letter to Joseph about another Muharram-festival: “all of a sudden they sprang and like a set of monkeys or wild cats right at us and yelling furiously” (8.9.57). This was written in the middle of the Indian Mutiny, which affected Bombay very little, but nobody could know at this moment how it would develop.

In many ways, Ingeborg herself is the main person in this letter. She foreshadows her own reactions in her way of telling the story: the Indians arrive, Ingeborg is standing on her veranda, the night is dark, the river silent and she filters the events through her emotional reactions which are permeated by the colonial discourse. She wonders (looks and looks again), exclaims that the sight is pitiful, is more astonished, puts the Butler with his correct behaviour and attitude in a vicarious position, mediating her own feelings and ending this terrible story with a joke. And this humorous ending places her of course in a paradoxical role. In contrast to the Indians’ wild dances and breaking up of borders, she, the European, is a calm onlooker, rational, categorizing and astounded; but she and her husband are at the same time making, even forcing, the Indians to what they understand as childlike behaviour. The letter is directed to George, and this might of course influence both her way of writing and what she writes about, for example her religious worries about her servants and her own religious correctness. Her letters to Joseph and George differ in several respects.

Another example: There is only one Indian who is given name and occupation:

Having arrived we were helped out of the carriage and immediately accosted by Mr Foyett another institution of Bombay “our worthy, talented and respected Commissioner of Police” as the Paper have it./ He is as black – as, well never mind, he is a perfect gentleman although he has the misfortune of being half casted, or *politer* speaking *12 annas to the rupee* (you see I am already teaching you Indian *slang*).<sup>48</sup>

Here again Ingeborg uses untranslated words, but Joseph probably knew them. In the Indian monetary system, 16 annas made a rupee. Mr Foyett was then understood as almost, but not quite white in Ingeborg’s patronizing tone. Among British Indians, the difference between rupees and annas were often used to indicate race.

Is this Indian slang or British Indian slang? An interesting coincidence is that the religious festival that Ingeborg describes in the first quotation above is a Shia Muslim ceremony, called the Mourning of Muharram. This ceremony inspired the name of a famous dictionary of transcultured words. During this festival the participants repeatedly cried: “Ya Hasan! Ya Hosein”, commemorating the martyrdom of Ali’s two sons Hasan and Husain, an expression that through corruption by British soldiers was converted to Hosseen Gosseen, Hossy Gossy, Hossein Jossen, and ultimately *Hobson-Jobson*, which became the slightly depreciatory name of the dictionary, first published in 1886, for the vocabulary

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<sup>48</sup> To George 3.5.59 p. 5-6.



developed by the British in India by adapting and domesticating Hindustani words.<sup>49</sup> There even exists a *law of Hobson-Jobson*, defined by the *OED* as “a phrase sometimes used of the process of adapting a foreign word to the sound-system of the adopting language”.

In November 1858, Ingeborg writes to Joseph: “I suppose you have begun to have fires by this time, oh how I wish I could pop in upon you some evening when you are all seated round the Kakelovn [tiled stove] in the twilight (does Mamma as she used still tell stories)”.<sup>50</sup> She ends her letter with the phrase: “Hils allesammanen Hjeme [send my love to everybody at home] and all friends who still remember me”. She has been in India for almost two years and the life she remembers seems to belong to childhood, a situation when “everybody” is there and no separation has taken place.

In June 1860 she is in Denmark and makes a trip with her sister Blanche and friends to Landskrona in the South West of Sweden. This is a trip she highly enjoys. In the letter, the English language is interwoven with Swedish words of different kinds. She uses the Swedish “Midsommarafton” and the Danish “St. Hansaften”, both meaning “Midsummer Eve”, to place the events in the festivity time. They meet “3 bottenärliga svenska sjömän” [3 downright honest Swedish sailors], and a simple and singing farmer. The group played singing games, walked around, looked at the flowers, “beautiful blåklint” [cornflower, bluebottle], had a sightseeing tour on the island of Hven, marched to the church there, listened to speeches during meals with “pankakor och caffe” [pancakes and coffee], and “knäckebröd” [hard bread].

Her Danish and especially Swedish words conjure up the world of her childhood and might function as questioning the translatability of experience. At the same time, these words and experiences suggest an archaic or frozen life, especially evident when the party sailed to the small island Hven, “where as yet no violent ideas of civilization have turned the honest peasant into a last vagabond, but where he goes contented as in Tykko Brahe’s days till his ground and sings to his work the birds giving echo to his song” (12). She seems to have a consciousness of classes, and places the lower classes in a patronizing idyllic space – a sharp contrast to the threatening Indian mob.

One concept of transculturation proposes “a continual process of adaptation and transformation”.<sup>51</sup> This is a way of describing the evolution of the British Indian language and the dictionary. But the concept is often used to describe the way “subordinated or marginal groups select or invent from materials transported to them by a dominant [...] culture”.<sup>52</sup> Attwell states that transcultural relationships can and often do involve violence. In Ingeborg’s letters direct violence is exerted at other places than those she visits, but the indirect violence is obvious, as my quotes show. Transculturation existed in India of course, but Ingeborg is not affected. She uses instead other strategies, which on the contrary distance her from India. She is a peripheral figure as woman and as placed in what she describes as inhospitable and strange places in the jungle; she automatically seems to adopt the colonial discourse.

Ingeborg was 18 when she arrived and never had a home in India of any permanence, sometimes having to camp out before any house was built. Once she moved into what she describes as a beautiful

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<sup>49</sup> Foreword to *The Hobson-Jobson Dictionary*.

<sup>50</sup> To Joseph 5.11.58.

<sup>51</sup> David Attwell, in *Studying transcultural literary history*, ed. Gunilla Lindberg-Wada, Berlin 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London and New York 1992.

house, but she could only stay there for a couple of months. This might be one reason why she did not save any letters. It was necessary to have light luggage. What she could think of as stability and home only existed in Copenhagen. She returned to Copenhagen as often as she could. This could be understood as a way of strengthening her foothold and identity. At the same time, many travels in and out of India were “crucial to creating and stabilizing both whiteness and middle-class status in India”.<sup>53</sup>

She left India more or less permanently in 1864 and only occasionally returned for short visits. But she did not get a home of her own in Copenhagen until May 1866.

The use of Hindustani words creates a space for the foreign, the different and the exotic, while the use of Danish and Swedish words brings back the memory of childhood. They create a longed for and unchanged homely space. These words seem to function as a yardstick of the important values in Ingeborg’s life. They signal cultural distance to her immediate surroundings, the Indian world. Home is connected to her mother and the undivided family, where stories are told and intimacy is possible. Home has an unchanging quality. It is placed in the middle of the city and includes excursions only to cultivated areas like the island of Hven – in contrast to the wild jungles in India. At home she moves freely about, meets her friends, walks in the city – in India she is imprisoned in her occasional homes because of the health regulations for whites and especially women. She has nothing to do, or finds nothing to do. When she leaves India, she continues to write to her brother very often, since she remembers the loneliness in India.

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<sup>53</sup> Elisabeth Buettner, *Empire Families. Britons and Later Imperial India*, Oxford 2004.

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### **When Z Lost Her Reference: Language, Culture and Identity in Xiaolu Guo's *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers***

I trying express me, but confusing – I see other little me try expressing me in other language [...] Is like seeing my two pieces of lips speaking in two languages at same time. Z in *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* (2008: 38-9)

Half way through Chinese-born British-based writer and film-maker Xiaolu Guo's debut novel in English, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* (2007), the self-named protagonist Z complains about losing her reference in the West: "But here, in this place in the west, I lost my reference. And I have to rely on my own sensibility. But my own sensibility toward the world is so unclear" (2008: 157). This reflection comes immediately after Z's painful experience of loneliness and her attempt to put this loneliness into words, into English words. Solitude is a concept she is unfamiliar with, having been brought up with Chinese collectivism. Loneliness, individualism, the self, even humour are from her Chinese perspective, Western concepts (2008: 156, 163, 269). *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* is Z's diary-cum-travelogue-cum-dictionary and it charts a specific year in her life – 2002 – when she is 23 and spends a year in London in order to learn English so that she can return to China and get a good job. It is, however, also a novel that tells us about a meeting between East and West, China and England, a woman and a man. But most of all, it tells us about language, culture and identity.

What animates Z's dictionary is the question of whether language influences and shapes thought. Or, to put it in another way, she is interested in understanding if "our mother tongue can affect how we think and how we perceive the world." This is the linguist Guy Deutscher's contention in *Through the Language Glass*, in which he explores "the relation between language, culture, and thought" (2010a: 6-7). Admitting that is a rather old-fashioned, if not notorious approach to take in linguistics, he nonetheless argues the case that language instils "habits of mind" that relate to "memory, attention, perception and association" (2010a: 22). He sets out to prove this contention through three concrete examples: colour concepts, spatial co-ordinates and grammatical gender. Like Z, his preoccupation is with "the power of cultural conventions" (2010a: 68). And the best way to understand "culture's role in shaping the concepts of language" is to think about language as offering a "framework of freedom within constraints" (2010a: 95). We need to move away from the notion that language is a prison house that limits what can be said and thought and embrace what he calls the Boas-Jakobson principle, expressed in a pithy maxim by Roman Jakobson thus: "Languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey" (2010a: 151). So languages differ primarily in what

information a specific language obliges the speaker to express.<sup>54</sup> The next step Deutscher takes is to suggest that: “When a language forces its speakers to pay attention to certain aspects of the world each time they open their mouths [...] such habits of speech can eventually settle into habits of mind with consequences for memory, or perception, or associations [...] (2010a: 152). A mother tongue is by definition a language you are exposed to and immersed in from birth, so speech habits, as Deutscher puts it, are “imprinted from an early age” (2010a: 192). That is why much of what we may think of as natural in fact largely depends on the cultural and linguistic conventions we have been exposed to (2010a: 232).

We can take these insights even one step further, inspired by Deutscher’s question of whether “speakers of different languages might perceive the *same reality* in different ways, just because of their mother tongues” (2010a: 218) and suggest that in a trans-cultural and trans-linguistic moment, such as the year covered in Z’s diary, such habits are brought to the forefront of perception and understanding, and in the process made strange and defamiliarised, for all parties involved in the encounter. The novel describes how habits of mind are profoundly affected in a trans-cultural meeting. In this paper I argue that the novel is fashioned around Z’s obsession with English habits of speech and habits of thought, and coming from a very different culture with different speech habits she questions how such habits are formed in the first place and explores the effect that they have on culture and thought. Through Z’s thoughts and her dialogues with her lover the novel explores how much of what we think of as natural is in fact the result of nurture, and further, how language shapes much of this thought. But it also shows that even though our mother tongue influences the way we think, it does not mean that our mother tongue limits our “intellectual horizons” or “constrains our ability to understand concepts or distinctions used in other languages,” to invoke Deutscher again (2010a: 324). This is his way of forming a distance to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which would have us believe that “our mother tongue restricts what we are able to think” (2010b). Although the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis – that language determines how humans think and perceive the structure of the world and that that structure differs from one language to another – has been out of favour for a long time, it may be useful to rethink it. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is also known as the principle of linguistic relativity, as Deutscher reminds us, and he goes on to say that implicit in this hypothesis is an assumption that “languages limit their speaker’s ability to express or understand concepts” (150). It is this idea that language limits what you can think that is the problem, not that language affects how you think. At the very beginning of the novel, Z expresses in her limited English and during her first month in London her thoughts on the difference between English and Chinese: “Chinese, we not having grammar. We saying things simple way. No verb-change-usage, no tense differences, no gender changes. We boss of our language. But English language is boss of English user” (2008: 24). Z, however, will soon learn that this is not correct, and that as she learns more English, she also learns to boss the language around. She learns that one specific language does not, as Deutscher argues, limit understanding of other cultures, even though it affects how you think. Cognitive psychologists who are interested in cross-linguistic differences in cognition, such as Lera Boroditsky,

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<sup>54</sup> This is not unlike Bill Ashcroft’s suggestions in *Caliban’s Voice* that a language, for example English, “*can* be an ontological prison it *need* not be” and, further, that: “The language we speak is very often crucial in establishing who we are. But it need not define the limits to what we can be” (2009: 3 and 97).

whom Deutscher also cites, are coming up with empirical evidence to support the general ideas behind the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Their findings suggest that language profoundly “shapes even the most fundamental dimensions of human experience: space, time, causality and relationships to others” (2011: 44). Boroditsky even suggests that “changing how people talk changes how people think” (2011: 45). In many ways, Xiaolou Guo has taken this suggestion up for consideration in her novel. She has Z ask questions about whether language shapes thought through thinking about the effect of grammar:

So time and space always bigger than little human in our country. Is not like order in English sentence, ‘I’ [...] in front of everything, supposing be most important thing to whole sentence ... Person as dominate subject, is main thing in an English sentence. Does it mean West culture respecting individuals more? (2008: 26-7)

In *Dictionary*, the central contention that Z battles with is linked to time, timing and the temporal. The novel charts a year in the life of the protagonist and is divided into the months of the year. It begins with a short section called “Before”, before a prologue and ends with an epilogue that comes after the subheading “Afterwards”. So throughout there is an emphasis on time passing as well as on the temporal. Indeed the novel can also be read as a Bildungsroman, since it pivots on the formative year in which Z becomes an adult (2008: 353). It is the temporal aspect and the difference between talking about and thinking about time that causes the most conflict between him and her. One of the central discussions in the novel on the notion of time is linked to love:

‘Live in the moment,’ I repeat. Why do I have to? ‘Live *in* the moment or live *for* the moment. Maybe you only live *for* the moment. That is so hippy. I can’t do that as a humble foreigner,’ I fight back [...] ‘Love’, this English word: like other English words it has tense. ‘Loved’ or ‘will love’ or ‘have loved’. All these specific tenses mean Love is time-limited thing. Not infinite. It only exist in particular period of time. In Chinese, Love is (ai). It has no tense. No past and future. Love in Chinese means a being, a situation, a circumstance. Love is existence, holding past and future. If our love existed in Chinese tense, then it will last forever. It will be infinite (2008: 301).

Z pinpoints one of the central habits of thought that linguistic conventions dictate in this particular novel – that because Chinese does not have linguistic tense in the same way that English does, the Chinese notion of love is infinitive, whereas the English perception of love is affected by time. This is not necessarily true, of course. What we also notice is that even though Z’s mother tongue does not force her to convey the tense in the same way that English does, it does not mean that Z does not understand the ways in which love can be affected by time passing. What she is in effect doing in such moments in the text is exploring acts of cultural translation.

Indeed, another way of looking at the novel is that in its entirety, it is an act of cultural translation. When Z loses her reference, she feels that she is losing herself. Twice in the novel she reaches a crisis point, and has to resort to Chinese characters, which are then on the next page translated by the editor

into English for us. In the first crisis she expresses how it feels to lose yourself as you gain another language:

I am sick of speaking English like this. I feel as if I am being tied up, as if I am living in a prison. I am scared that I have become a person who is always very aware of talking, speaking, and I have become a person without confidence, because I can't be me. I have become so small, so tiny, while the English culture surrounding me becomes enormous (2008: 180).

The second crisis has to do with the conflict – as she sees it – between love and freedom (2008: 196). There are many interesting observations here. But first, we need to think about how the reader also reaches a crisis point here. Who is the editor, and why is this editor suddenly involved in Z's dictionary-diary. We have to juggle at least two reader responses: one that is linked to feeling that we are reading a diary-in-progress, noticing how Z's language is improving and how she becomes better at putting her thoughts into words. The response needs to be readjusted after the first crisis point, when we suddenly realise that we are in fact reading a novel that has been through the hands of an editor-translator and that Z's language may have been, probably has been, edited in the process. We also notice that at this critical juncture in the novel, Z indeed feels that language imprisons her, not her mother tongue, but English. It makes her less her, because she is constantly so self-consciously aware of the fact of speaking. She feels small. This however is contrary to how the reader and her lover perceive her. Throughout the novel, as she gains mastery of the English language, she grows in confidence and stature, while her lover shrinks. Z knows this: "I talk and talk, more and more. I steal your words. I steal all your beautiful words. I speak your language" (2008: 293)

In his autobiographical piece "The Vernacular Cosmopolitan" Homi K. Bhabha writes about cultural translation that it

is not simply appropriation or adaptation; it is a process through which cultures are required to revise their own systems of reference, norms and values, by departing from their habitual or 'inbred' rules of transformation. Ambivalence and antagonism accompanies any act of cultural translation, because negotiating with the 'difference of the other' reveals the radical insufficiency of sedimented, settled systems of meaning and signification; it demonstrates, as well, the inadequacy of those 'structures of feeling' (as Raymond Williams would have put it), through which we experience our cultural authenticity and authority as being somehow 'natural' to us and part of a national landscape (2000: 141).

This is exactly what happens in *Dictionary*. Z's diary-dictionary reveals what happens in the act of cultural and indeed linguistic translation: her habits of thought undergo a profound revision as a result of her negotiation with the English other. And just as Deutscher also argued, she discovers that there is nothing natural in the ways in which the English – or indeed the Chinese – think about ideas such as love, freedom and identity. Not only did her year in the UK force her to become an adult, it also transformed her in other ways. She constantly complains about losing her reference, whereas in truth,

she has not really lost any references, rather gained many new ones. She also complains about losing her self. Again, she emerges at the end of her book with a more reflective sense of self. It is clear that the West has affected her, as is inevitable in trans-cultural encounters. But for Z it is also clear that Chinese culture does not sufficiently sustain her any more. After her stay in the West, she needs a more flexible and trans-cultural perspective on her newly-adult life and identity. Back home she feels “out of place in China” (2008: 352), yet she does not want to go back to England. Her mother castigates her: “You know what your problem is: you never think of the future! You only live in the present!” (2008: 351). This echo does not fail to remind both Z and the reader of how Z once said the exact same thing to her lover. We also remember that Z’s English at that time was good enough for her to play with it. Living *in* or *for* the moment; playing with the preposition, those small words that are so hard to get right for non-native speakers, profoundly changes the whole meaning of the expression.

Throughout the novel, language emerges not only as the central theme, but also as a way of staging the self, as a way of constructing a flexible identity. In *Caliban’s Voice*, Bill Ashcroft explains the postcolonial language debate – most vividly expressed as the quarrel between Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiongo – as typically stemming from a “confusion between language as a communicative tool and language as a cultural symbol” (2009: 2), as a confusion between what language does and how it is used (the performative aspect of language) and what language is or stands for (the ontological aspect of language). It makes sense he suggests to think of language as social practice in which language operates a strategic tool for language users. Ashcroft goes on the claim that “This active engagement with language, this constant performative use, is a key to the role of language in constructing a private, religious, national or cultural identity. The language we speak is very often crucial in establishing who we are. But it need not define the limits to what we can be” 2009: (96-7). The last comment here is the most important I think. From this perspective, Ashcroft can suggest that language’s most important function is as “a tool of self-fashioning” (2009: 101) and in this way, as is vividly expressed in postcolonial literature and multicultural literature in general, “our identity, our subjectivity, is *performed by*, rather than *embodied in* language. (103). I would suggest that it is precisely this revelation Z reaches during the course of her dictionary. She indeed realizes that language, as Ashcroft puts it, is a “tool of self-fashioning”. Z uses language as mediator, as facilitator and as bridge. She uses language to make sense of who the other is and who she herself is. She uses language to fashion herself as an adult, and to make sense of both Chinese and English culture. Bhikhu Parekh writes thus about culture and the centrality of culture to his vision of human subjectivity:

Cultures do change, but over a long period of time, and in the meantime they retain a measure of coherence, continuity and identity. Though not all-important, culture is important as the basis of individual identity and self-understanding. It shapes its members, structures their forms of thoughts and views of the world, organizes their lives, provides a system of meaning, values and ideals and so on (2002: 140).

In short culture here acts as references for the individual and her community. When Z complains about losing her reference we think that what she means is her Chinese culture and her language. But that is

clearly not the case: as her English improves, she teaches her lover about Chinese culture and, as we have seen, slips into Chinese when she reaches crucial pints in her live abroad. Having said that, however, there is one reference that she seems to forfeit: One reference point that she loses in the west is the grand and sustaining story of communism and collectivity, with the solidity and security, even timelessness, that has hitherto sustained her. This is clearly what she loses – but she also gains something in that particular cultural translation.

It has become a bit of a cliché, but it is still worth repeating Salman Rushdie's diagnosis of his own situation as a translated man: "Having been borne across the world, we are translated men [and women!]. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained" (1992: 17). Being translated – moving from one cultural place to another – can thus have diverse effects. Migration can lead to fusion – what Rushdie calls straddling two cultures – or confusion – what he calls falling between two stools (1992: 15). Or a complex and ambiguous mixture of both outcomes, which is where I suspect Z finds herself, as we see at the end of the novel.

Rushdie further elaborates on the notion of translation as affording a "double perspective" or a "stereoscopic vision" characteristic of the migrant perspective as simultaneously insiders and outsiders and how this double perspective is perhaps what replaces the loss of "whole sight" (1992: 19). It is the same double vision Edward Said praises in his *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994): "Because the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation" (1994: 44). The exile he writes "exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another" (1994: 36). Homi K. Bhabha makes a similar statement in the Introduction to *The Location of Culture* (1994) commenting on his "intellectual twin" Salman Rushdie, that "the truest eye may now belong to migrant's double vision" (1994: 5). Yet there is a sense that all the evocations of unique insights, double perspectives and true eyes are only true of those migrants who straddle the fusion of two cultures, and not so much so for those confused souls who fall between two stools and thus lose vistas all together. Albeit only an exile or migrant for a year Z's experiences, however, fit these typically 1990s discourses. After weathering her many crises in the West, she emerges not only an adult, but also a more mature person, one able to enjoy the benefits of a stereoscopic vision. However, this double perspective, coupled with the loss of the sustaining narrative of collectivism, means that she feels out of place in China, as she felt in England, where even with a much-improved English, she was still a self-proclaimed "humble foreigner". Yet that way of fashioning your self may also be a practical label behind which you can hide as you make critical comments on the host society.

We can say that Z's year in England has afforded her a trans-cultural, or perhaps even a multicultural perspective on life, since she has submerged herself in a very different culture and language from that with which she has been brought up. Parekh elaborates on the effect of a multicultural perspective on life:



For the multiculturalist, we are human beings but also cultural beings, born and raised within and shaped by a thick culture, which we can no doubt revise and even reject but only by embracing some other culture [...] By engaging in a critically sympathetic dialogue with other cultures, it [i.e. the culture] comes to appreciate its own strengths and limitations, becomes conscious of what is distinctive to it as well as what it shares in common with them, and enjoys the opportunity to enrich itself by judiciously borrowing from them what it finds attractive and can easily assimilate (2002: 141).

Charles Taylor makes use of Hans-George Gadamer's hermeneutical notion "fusion of horizons" in this context. This is how Gadamer activates the concept in *Truth and Method*:

In fact the horizon of the present is continuously in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past [...] *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*" (1993: 306).

For Gadamer, then, the fusion of horizons is something that inevitably occurs in the encounter between our present cultural preconceptions and those of the past, and this encounter leads to increased understanding of the present position. In a similar manner, Taylor argues, we learn to manoeuvre in a multicultural world: "We learn to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture. The 'fusion of horizons' operates through our developing new vocabularies of comparison, by means of which we can articulate these contrasts" (1994: 67).

By way of conclusion, I want to explore the notion of vocabularies of comparison in more detail, because it seems to me that that particular idea works as a worthwhile perspective on what happens to language in the novel. But first, by way of comparison, and to add to the discussion, I want to briefly read Guo in tandem with Neel Mukherjee's *A Life Apart* (2008/2011). *A Life Apart* tells the story of protagonist Ritwick's short life, first in an abusive family in India, and then as a student in Oxford, and finally as rent-boy in London. The moment I want to discuss is when Ritwick discovers that an Oxford friend works for the NSPCC helpline and how her talk about childhood abuse affects Ritwick's sensibilities, as he thinks about "the lost innocence of the word 'abuse'":

The English he has grown up with in India is slightly different from England English; there is a touch of a phase-lag somewhere – they do not superimpose on each other perfectly. 'Abuse' for Ritwick has always meant the hurling of loud, angry, possibly filthy words at someone else – you call someone a motherfucking bastard and that would be abuse. But to have it upgraded like this, in the casual, snap of two finger, to his entire childhood, to his relationship with a mother who is not there anymore to answer questions or even to listen to him – no, that can't be right. And surely this has happened, more or less, to every child in India? He feels a sudden rush of irritation for this

business of other cultures, other countries, renaming and recategorizing things, using their own yardsticks, for other people, as if their definitions were universal. But this fades away as swiftly as it has arrived with the question: ‘What if they’re right?’ The momentousness of the answer is always kept at bay by that classic reasoning: it happens to other people, not to me. He hasn’t got around to the cognitive shift ‘abuse’ has undergone (2011: 182-3).

In the cracks between slightly different semantic content of words – the phase-lag – is where the opportunity arises to develop vocabularies of comparison, and such new vocabularies have the potential to change your entire mental perspective on life and indeed your reference. It is not only a linguistic cognitive shift that takes place in such moments in these texts, it is also a psychological cognitive shift, as we see for Ritwick, and for Z. Learning a new language – England English – also changes the way they think about life. They are forced to think about the same reality in new and different ways. For Ritwick this readjustment pivots on the word ‘abuse’, for Z on ‘love’. In one of the last instalments in her dictionary, appropriately entitled “Timing”, a more mature and wise Z contemplates the notion of grammatical tense again via a sentence by the old sage Ibn Arabi: “The universe continues to be in the present tense”. This sentence activates her new vocabulary of comparison, her cognitive shift, and her understanding of the power of cultural and linguistic conventions: “Does that mean English tense difference is just complicated for no reason? Does that mean tenses are not natural things at all? Does that mean love is a form that continues for ever and for ever, juts like in my Chinese concept?” (2008: 326). Z is beginning to understand that our mother tongue instils habits of thought that we might not be aware of until we are faced to rethink them in a trans-cultural moment of cultural translation. For her, this moment was the year she grew up and discovered love in the shape of a middle-aged Englishman.

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## **Levels of Translation in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan***

### **Introduction**

There is one aspect of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* that has not received due critical attention – the frequent occurrence of the Japanese language in the English-language text of the novel. As most of the words and phrases have been translated, it does not cause major problems for understanding the text. Yet texts like *Obasan* as well as Kerri Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field*, where translations are often not provided, raise the issue of cross-cultural analysis in general, and translation in particular. Not only do Japanese words and phrases in *Obasan* fall into different categories, but translation operates on different levels of the novel. The novel addresses not only the issue of translation and mistranslation on the level of language but also the translation and mistranslation on the level of the relationship between the Japanese-Canadians and the mainstream society including the Canadian government. On a metalevel, there is also the problem of translation and mistranslation of Kogawa's novel by literary critics. The paper suggests a model based on the levels of translation for an analysis of the novel.

### **1. Translation and mistranslation/incomprehension on the linguistic level**

The presence of the Japanese language slows down or even interrupts the reading process. When the readers encounter the Japanese language in *Obasan*, and if they do not understand Japanese, they experience something very similar to what Roland Barthes discusses in *Empire of Signs*:

The dream: to know a foreign (alien) language and yet not to understand it: to perceive the difference in it without that difference ever being recuperated by the superficial sociality of discourse, communication or vulgarity; to know, positively refracted in a new language, the impossibilities of our own; to learn the systematics of the inconceivable; to undo our own "reality" under the effect of other formulations, other syntaxes; to discover certain unsuspected positions of the subject in utterance, to displace the subject's topology; in a word, to descend into the untranslatable /.../ We know that the chief concepts of Aristotelian philosophy have been somehow *constrained* by the principal articulations of the Greek language. How beneficial it would be, conversely, to gain a vision of the irreducible differences which a very remote language can, by glimmerings, suggest to us. (Barthes 1983: 6-7)

#### **1.1. Japanese words or phrases inserted in the English text**

A closer examination of these shows that they serve three basic ends.

##### **1.1.1. Translating Japanese culture into English**

In a scene where Aunt Emily and Uncle recall good times in the past, when Naomi, the protagonist of the novel was little, the Uncle suddenly switches into Japanese: "Fubuki hodo, chika yori soe ba, atataka

shi” (Kogawa 1994: 261). The protagonist’s brother Stephen is puzzled, because he does not understand his heritage language, and when he is being told that this is “a haiku, a seventeen-syllable world picture,” he becomes nervous, because he is “always uncomfortable when anything is ‘too Japanese’” (Ibid.). The scene introduces a piece of traditional Japanese culture to the reader and Stephen, but also points to a problem that the legacy of his cultural heritage has become a burden to him. Aunt Emily “works the translation” of the haiku “As the storm rages ... our drawing closer ... keeps us warm” (Ibid.). This refers to the time when the values of the Japanese-Canadian community turned against them during WW II, and estranged him from his family, culture and language.

There is an instance when Naomi senses the discomfort of her Grandmother and the latter responds to Naomi’s providing her a cushion with a phrase in Japanese: “Yoku ki ga tsuku ne” (Kogawa 1994: 68). The phrase is not translated, but an explanation follows: “It is a statement in appreciation of sensitivity and appropriate gestures” (Ibid.). Here the reader is given a glimpse of Japanese culture of communication, the nature of close relationships, but is left wondering, why there is no translation. Here an observation of Eva Hoffman may be useful: “You can’t transport human meanings whole from one culture to another any more than you can transliterate a text” which stems from the fact that “In order to transport a single word without distortion one would have to transport the entire language around it.” Thus, “In order to translate a language, or a text, without changing its meaning, one would have to transport its audience as well” (1991: 175, 272, 273).

### **1.1.2. Rendering the atmosphere of safety and homeliness**

In a scene where Naomi oversees how a hen suddenly begins to kill chicken in the pen, the mother engages in a comforting dialogue with her. Interestingly, the mother begins her dialogue in English: “It was not good, was it?” and then continues in Japanese “Yoku nakatta ne” (Kogawa 1994: 72). Adult Naomi’s comment refers to how it is exactly the Japanese phrase that is able to calm down the emotional storm in the child’s mind: “Three words. Good, negation of good in the past tense, agreement with statement. It is not a language that promotes hysteria. There is no blame or pity. I am not responsible. The hen is not responsible ... ‘Kyotsuke nakattara abunai,’ she says.” (Ibid.). And the exchange concludes by mother’s rendering the same in English: “If there is not carefulness, there is danger” (Ibid.). While the mother uses both English and Japanese in communicating with her child, it is also obvious that the Japanese language, especially due to the atmosphere of homeliness and safety it creates, has a crucial role in comforting the child and setting the world to rights. This echoes Hoffman’s notion of human meanings related to a certain language and culture. Also, the mother’s calm in Naomi’s rendering of the scene is juxtaposed to the Canadian government’s war-time hysteria.

### **1.1.3. Referring to the main concerns in the novel**

This is a subtle yet significant function of two recurring Japanese phrases in the text whose full weight is revealed only in the end of the novel. “Mo ikutsu? What is your age now,” Naomi’s uncle asks from the girl who responds: “Eighteen” (Kogawa 1994: 3). At first sight, especially at the beginning of the novel it may seem to be a common question from of the older relative, who wants to double-check if he remembers her age right. However, the question of the age of Naomi is related to the suitable age when

the relatives consider it appropriate to eventually tell her and Stephen what happened to their mother in Japan. That would finally answer the most burning question for them of their mother's failure to return to Canada despite the promises.

Another recurrent phrase in the novel is "Kodomo no tame. For the sake of the children" (Kogawa 1994: 26) that the protagonist remembers her relatives to have often used in their subdued conversation but whose meaning had remained obscure to her. Adult Naomi sees this as a manifestation of how "The memories were drowned in a whirlpool of protective silence" and how "Calmness was maintained" (Ibid.). It is related to the theme of saving the children from the terrible truth of their mother's suffering during and after the Nagasaki atomic bombing, and thus it carries a central theme, the secret about the fate of the protagonist's mother, which haunts the children.

## **1.2. Mixed-language words or phrases**

In addition to Japanese words and phrases that are obviously correct in terms of Japanese vocabulary and grammar, *Obasan* features also words and phrases that are combinations of the Japanese and the English language. These include also translations or mistranslations of culture, language, image, including cases of Pidgin language.

### **1.2.1. Mistranslation from English into Japanese**

By way of a cursing of a reckless driver whose overtaking of Stephen's car flings a rock against the windshield, Stephen mumbles while braking the car: "Sakana fish" (Kogawa 1994: 262). Aunt Emily is puzzled and only Naomi's explanation provides background to the linguistic phenomenon: "Some of the ripe pidgin English phrases we pick up are three-part inventions – part English, part Japanese, part Sasquatch. 'Sonuva bitch' becomes 'sakana fish,' 'sakana' meaning 'fish' in Japanese. On occasion the phrase is 'golden sakana fish.'" (Ibid.). This is a very interesting case of creolisation of languages, which the uncle interestingly puts down to the fact that Toronto is too far (Ibid.).

### **1.2.2. Incomprehension of the English language by the Japanese**

The inner workings of languages may be completely different as is manifest in the difficulty of a Japanese character in the novel to understand the idiomatic English phrase 'to be in love:' "I am thinking of the time when I was a child and asked Uncle if he and Obasan were 'in love.' My question was out of place. 'In ruv? What that?' Uncle asked" (Kogawa 1994: 7). The phrase points to the linguistic specificity of the lack of 'l' in Japanese which is replaced by 'r' and it also implies that the Uncle is stuck with the literal image suggested by the English idiom. There is the wondering of Naomi and Uncle about the differences between languages and logics in them. Bearing in mind Walter Benjamin's observation that "Translation ... ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central relationship between languages" (1968: 72), this instance in the novel points to the failure of the Uncle in establishing this relationship, which Naomi's mother could do with ease.

## **2. Translation and mistranslation/incomprehension on the level of the relationship between the Japanese-Canadians and the mainstream society**

These cases speak about problems on the character level in terms of race, ethnicity, and cultural difference, including orientalism.

### **2.1. Individual level of mistranslation/abuse of Japanese-Canadians by white Canadians**

Naomi is often treated as a foreigner due to her Asian looks as well as being exoticised and orientalised. When Naomi is working as a teacher, a parent wants to know where she comes from. Naomi is puzzled: “How do you mean?” – ‘How long have you been in this country?’ – ‘I was born here’” (Kogawa 1994: 8). Lengthy questionings of her origin and relation to Canada are both boring and offensive judging by her ironical comment: “What else would anyone want to know? Personality: Tense. Is that past or present tense? It’s perpetual tense.” (Kogawa 1994: 9). The mutual attitudes cut off any chance for the development of a further relationship: “The widower never asked me out again. I wonder how I was unsatisfactory” (Ibid.). There seems to be mistrust and stereotyping from both sides and the situation can be explained by David Henry Hwang’s argument in the afterword to his play *M. Butterfly* that “the myths of the East, the myths of the West, the myths of men, and the myths of women – these have so saturated our consciousness that truthful contact between nations and lovers can only be the result of heroic effort. Those who prefer to bypass the work involved will remain in a world of surfaces, misperceptions running rampant” (1986: 100).

### **2.1. National/Governmental level of mistranslation/abuse of the Japanese-Canadian community**

The Japanese-Canadian community is seen as enemy aliens during World War II and they experience harsh segregation: “Signs have been posted on all highways – ‘Japs Keep Out’” (Kogawa 1994: 103), as Aunt Emily writes in her letter to her sister, Naomi’s mother in Japan. At the same time as the provincial government of British Columbia and the Canadian Government issue restrictive laws and organise the internment they never wish to see the Japanese-Canadians as a loyal community, but attribute to them the label of potential fifth columnists. Thus they perform an act of deliberate mistranslation.

### **2.2. Japanese lost in translation**

What the Japanese-Canadians face during and after the internment is their selective treatment – in reality, they are taken to internment camps, yet the vocabulary used in the official discourse is quite different. The euphemisms support the official idea that the Japanese-Canadian relocation was done for their own good to save them from the white population’s hatred. However, the incarceration is challenged by Aunt Emily: “The government called them ‘Interior Housing Projects’! With language like that you can disguise any crime” (Kogawa 1994: 41). The confusion about the ongoing events as well as the position and identity of the Japanese-Canadians in the new historical and political situation could be characterised as being lost in translation for the Japanese-Canadians.

The double discourse was employed also in print media. A war-time propaganda article in a newspaper featured “a photograph of one family, all smiles, standing around a pile of beets. The caption reads: ‘Grinning and Happy’” (Kogawa 1994: 231). The article, offensively titled “‘Find Jap Evacuees

Best Beet Workers' represents the Japanese-Canadians as follows: "Generally speaking, Japanese evacuees have developed into most efficient beet workers, many of them being better than the transient workers who cared for beets in southern Alberta before Pearl Harbor" (Kogawa 1994: 232). The mistranslation and misrepresentation of the Japanese-Canadians and its unbearable legacy can be best summarised in Naomi's words: "And I am tired, I suppose, because I want to get away from all this. ... I want to break loose from the heavy identity, the evidence of rejection, the unexpressed passion, the misunderstood politeness" (Kogawa 1994: 218), which points to a failure of white Canada to embrace her Japanese community historically as well in the narrative present of the novel in the 1970s.

### **3. Translating the untranslatable/translating grief**

#### **3.1. Individual Level**

In the light of trauma theory, Kogawa's novel is also about translating the untranslatable and translating grief. Adult Naomi comes to a realisation of one reason for Aunt Obasan's life-long silence when he observes: "The language of her grief is silence. She has learned it well, its idioms, its nuances. Over the years, silence within her small body has grown large and powerful" (Kogawa 1994: 17). At the core of the novel is a question, whether it is at all possible to put into words the suffering of the Japanese-Canadian community. The novel provides an answer to this by showing that not only is it possible by the means of narrative, but the telling is also vital for the Japanese-Canadian community and the white Canada alike.

#### **3.2. National Level**

The double standards of white mainstream treatment of Japanese-Canadians – as Canadian citizens and enemy aliens, yellow peril and a model minority – can be further analysed by applying to Canadian context Anne Anlin Cheng's theorising of the relationship between the white America and her racial others in the terms of melancholia. In her discussion of American racial dynamics, Cheng argues that "Racialization in America may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others" (2001: 10). Such polarisation of central/marginal is further consolidated by "positing the other as always Other and lost to the heart of the nation. Legal exclusion naturalizes the more complicated 'loss' of the unassimilable racial other" (Ibid.). White American identity is founded on the very exclusion of other races, and thus there is a curious bind between the two, whereas "The racists need to develop elaborate ideologies in order to accommodate their actions with official American ideals, while white liberals need to keep burying the racial others in order to memorialize them" (Cheng 2001: 10). The novel shows that a similar construction and sustaining of white Canadian identity through its Japanese-Canadian other has historically happened also in Canada.

### **4. Translation and Mistranslation/Incomprehension on the metalevel of the critical discourse on Kogawa's *Obasan***

The positive aspect of the quick canonisation of *Obasan* as a landmark work in Canadian literature is marred by a problem pointed out by Roy Miki that even some of the best literary critics have provided a



revolutionary interpretation to the novel while the text itself undermines the idea (1998: 115). Thus, the acceptance of the novel into Canadian literary history has happened on the terms of the requirements of the national canon. Miki especially problematizes the optimistic renderings of the final scene of the novel which, on attentive reading, is not only open-ended, but it is followed by a document that constitutes the real ending of the novel's text, often ignored by critics as part of the novel serving exactly in the same function as the documents inserted elsewhere in the text (1998: 115-116).

In his article "After *Obasan*: Kogawa Criticism and Its Futures" Guy Beauregard argues "that the shape of Kogawa criticism needs to be understood as a symptom of cultural politics of contemporary Canadian literary studies, in which literary critics attempt to discuss a 'racist past' in a 'multicultural present.'" (Beauregard 2001: 14) Miki's and Beauregard's views resonate with Lisa Lowe's observation which can be extrapolated to Canada as well that "Asian American cultural forms emphasize instead that because of the complex history of racialization, sites of minority cultural production are at different distances from the canonical nationalist project of resolution" (1996: 31).

### **Conclusion**

Certainly not all texts lend themselves to an analysis on all the levels mentioned above, but it is possible that there emerge other equally significant literal or metaphorical meanings of translation. The insertion of foreign words and phrases in English-language texts deserves further critical attention because there is more to it than adding cultural colour to a piece of fiction in English. As the discussion of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* has shown, Japanese words and phrases can imply also a host of complex issues of personal and national identity.

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## Translated Identities in Settler Literature

The concept ‘translated identities’ is a vexed one since it presupposes semantically a distinct move from one position to another. As written expression of this, textual spaces are woven meeting places rather than points of clash, and a transcultural approach can aid in understanding the identities portrayed. Andrew Parker, writing of intercultural encounters, notes in “Home and Away”: “Translation is the great literary work for making one culture’s discoveries available to people in a different and often distant culture. Its great practical value is that it makes the spread of crucial, modern information a real force for cultural understanding.”<sup>55</sup> However, just as any translation in literary works may vary enormously in its interpretation of the connotations of the original, so translated identities as a concept expresses the ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in possessing more than one cultural heritage.

Alan Duff’s *Both Sides of the Moon*, where the protagonist “Jimmy sees himself as part of both sides of the moon,”<sup>56</sup> is a classic example of such expression where even the protagonist is conscious of his own mixed cultural identities.

I am torn; yet I am more whole, since I am of both understandings, though no singular one. I am two races, two cultures and, most of all, two different thinkings. I am in a way against myself. But I can speak for both.<sup>57</sup>

This quote from Alan Duff’s book epitomizes the conflict of identities which many protagonists in Australasian literature express. Not only are they ethnically mixed, but culturally their emotional and social lives may be a balancing act.

Translated identities are those which not only make a crossover from one culture to another, but also remain in a constant state of flux between the different cultures and identities as in Castro’s novel *Birds of Passage* (1983). The protagonist, Seamus O’Young after discovering an old journal written by Lo Yun Shan, one of the many Chinese recruited to work in the gold mines in Australia, notices an increasing number of parallels between his own life and that of his Chinese ancestor over a hundred years earlier. The journal forces him to reflect on his own translated identities as a blue-eyed Chinese-Australian.

The social anthropological use of the plural form ‘identities’ is significant as no one has only one identity, and identities change through time as we pass along the ‘routes’ of life of which Stuart Hall

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<sup>55</sup> Andrew Parker, “Home and Away” in Heinz Antor, Matthias Merkl, Klaus Stierstorfer, Laurenz Volkmann, eds. *From Interculturalism to Transculturalism: Mediating Encounters in Cosmopolitan Context*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2010. This book has several interesting approaches to the issue of transculturalism.

<sup>56</sup> Cover blurb on Alan Duff, *Both Sides of the Moon*. (1998) (Auckland: Vintage, 2000).

<sup>57</sup> *Both Sides of the Moon*, 7.

writes.<sup>58</sup> By translated identities in the Pacific context I posit that both New Zealanders and Australians, because they are settler immigrant countries, have had to adjust their original cultural belonging to another topographical and climatic environment, as well as forming new linguistic expressions to describe these phenomena. As different ethnic and national groups have immigrated to these countries, there has been a constant interchange of culture, though not in any organised form, or even necessarily conscious. A key aspect of settler literature is this expression of individual and societal cultural border crossings. The ‘contact zones’, to use Mary Pratt’s words, may be in theme or language, using the dominant culture’s language to portray cultural identities and phenomena which provide the reader with constantly moving translated identities. Pacific writing, both in language, content and genre, is often characterized by cultural hybridity and a use of language which has highly local significance in a global context, the ‘glocal’ v. the global. By that I mean that cultural phenomena are expected to be understood by the reader, often making the ‘insider’ reader ‘strange.’<sup>59</sup> This brings in the whole concept of register, that is the form of language which is particular to one individual or a group - a kind of code. Expressions, which might be considered grammatically or politically incorrect elsewhere, are acceptable within this framework.

Real life border-crossing in settler countries has a finality, especially earlier, of moving from one to the other with the chance of return slight, whereas literature from these countries opens up the possibility of crossing and re-crossing those boundaries, of visiting the past as one way of understanding the present. These identities are being formed through an adaptation to the new whilst retaining a semblance, to a greater or lesser extent, of the old. This may explain why so much literature from Australia and New Zealand deals with historical fictional persons as in Patrick White’s *Voss* (1957), and *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) both of which show a protagonist battling against nature in the new country but with very different outcomes. Peter Carey’s *The True History of the Kelly Gang* (2001) and *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988) are other examples.

Memory gives fluidity to such texts as Les Murray’s *Fredy Neptune* where, through his travels throughout the twentieth century world from the massacre of the Armenian women, to Nazi Germany, to Hollywood, and back in rural Australia as a farmer, we see how flexible his identities are. Questions of belonging, often under the guise of love, are recurrent in the oeuvre of Christina Stead perhaps most clearly portrayed in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1976). Maybe both Les Murray and Christina Stead are examples of the literature of translated identities which do not rely on memory and its fluidity, but rather the creative voice of the author.

The narrative expression of translated identities is different in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand<sup>60</sup> for two major reasons. Aotearoa is a country where all are immigrants – the Maori coming first from Polynesia and bringing with them Polynesian culture with advanced cultural artefacts and its class distinctions, which Alan Duff has dealt with this in *Once We Were Warriors* (1990) where he criticizes

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<sup>58</sup> See Stuart Hall and Paul de Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1996?). The introductory chapter analyses in some detail the conflictual issues in what we mean by cultural identities.

<sup>59</sup> See Reed Way Dasenbrock, “Intelligibility and Meaningfulness in Multicultural Literature in English” *PMLA* where he defends unintelligibility in a text as actually placing the reader as the ‘other’.

<sup>60</sup> The official name of the country is Aotearoa New Zealand.

the Maori for forgetting their heritage. Likewise in *The Matriarch* Witi Ihimaera relates the history of one of the noble Maori families and the powerful women of the past. Though fictional stories these texts are underscored by other historical documentary records.

The next group of settlers were whalers who left ship and settled, often intermarrying with Maori. Then followed the influx of Scots, Irish and Englishmen looking for a better life than that in the home country. The contact between the two groups was often amicable – for example Bishop Monrad, former Prime Minister of Denmark, who settled in the Manawatu area for five years in the 1860s, spent much of his time learning Maori with one of the local chiefs and translating the Bible into Maori. Since the Maori represent 12% of the population, intermarriage has always taken place and with it linguistic exchange, as is seen today in the fact that many Maori words are part of the New Zealand language and never translated, and glossaries are not used except occasionally when publishing outside New Zealand. However, there are also writers of other ethnic origins such as Amelia Batistich from Dalmatia, and Yvonne du Fresne of Danish-Huguenot origin,<sup>61</sup> who have written in a manner similar to writers of the Maori Renaissance of what it means to be a person with translated identities and where the focus on belonging is central.

In Australia, by contrast, the convict colony dominated early settlement. It was a way for people to shake off the shackles of Victorian England and become their own masters as for example in Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2006), shortlisted for the Booker Prize. The indigenous people, Aborigine, there from time immemorial, were considered as non-existent because they did not tend the land or run their societies in the European manner. Terra Nullius was a stated fact. Lack of cultural respect for other ways of viewing the relation between man and the land, and the belief in Victorian concepts of the mental inferiority of the black man, all led to the formation of Australian identities that excluded the indigenous people. Add to this the White Australia Policy that, among other degrading laws, forcibly removed aboriginal children from their homes, (so moving told in the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*.) made assimilation a national policy, and ensured the dominance of the white man. Aboriginal narratives were and are oral, often known as the 'dreamtime', and transferred through ritual, music and visual artefacts illustrating that literacy is not necessarily based on written sources. Native linguistic expression was not included, even to this day – due in part to the vast number of Aboriginal languages, and the fact that several tribes do not understand one another. In Australia there has never been the mix of languages we find in Aotearoa.

Since the historical background of New Zealand and Australia has certain fundamental differences this is also reflected in their literature. The Maori Renaissance of the 1960s and 70s was a real breakthrough in New Zealand with the works of Patricia Grace, Witi Ihimaera and the late Hone Tuwhare. Written in English but with Maori concepts Patricia Grace's short stories and novels illustrate and discuss the translated identities of those of Maori descent. For example, describing mythological origins about the beginning of the world in the short story, "The Sky People," she narrates how the obstreperous children of Sun and Earth, all conjoined in one circular whole, push their parents apart and form the Sky and the Earth. However, Grace usually gives such traditional tales a contemporary twist,

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<sup>61</sup> See Anne Holden Rønning, *'For Was I Not Born Here?' Identity and Culture in the Work of Yvonne du Fresne*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010.

and this one ends with a psychological comment on how the parents, Sky and Earth, wonder where they went wrong in bringing up their children! Most of Grace's work takes up the conflict of belonging in and to more than one culture, and the personal and social issues ensuant. For example, in *Mutuwhenua* her protagonist, a young Maori girl called Ripeka, gives herself an English name and tries hard to behave and be a Pakeha. The text expresses the conflict of translated identities many young feel of being of mixed race, an issue that is also found in novels with the half-caste as protagonist in the colonial period.<sup>62</sup> Contemporary Maori may be said to live translated identities in their lives as they balance between two cultures crossing from one to the other, often with ease, but with an increasing consciousness of belonging in neither, as Duff's protagonist states.

If we turn to Australia, literature has traditionally been more based in the Anglo-British tradition, resulting in what A.A. Phillips called 'the cultural cringe', which today may be replaced perhaps by the 'multicultural cringe,' a point I cannot go into here. There has been and is a trend in settler fiction of explaining the past and relating it to the present identities of Australians. What it means to be an Australian and what is the Australian language are central issues.<sup>63</sup> Translated identities have also often been expressed by concentration on historical figures and events discussed fictionally (see references to Patrick White, Peter Carey and Kate Grenville above).

But probably the best and most controversial examples of translated identities are texts which portray Aborigine characters, such as David Ireland's *Burn*, Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* and the texts of Mudrooroo.<sup>64</sup> In many ways these fictional Aborigine characters fit the 'traditional' view. Mudrooroo is a particularly interesting case here as his early works are about the conflict between urban and rural life for Aborigine, whereas his later work deals more with mythological aspects. Oodgeroo, who often uses poetry as political discourse, is the most outspoken author on the problems of translated identities in Australian society of the late twentieth century, often contrasting the two identities within the same poem. In the 90s and early twenty-first century several texts and anthologies have been published such as *Auntie Rita*, and the anthology *Paperbark* (1994). The latter is particularly significant as it contains a novella by Mudrooroo "Struggling" which contradicts the theoretical views he propounds on Aborigines in literature in *Writing from the Fringe* (1990).

In conclusion, I have sketched above some ideas as to how we may approach the issue of translated identities in literature from the Pacific are, but are these translated identities really 'translated identities'? Or does this literature express a resistance to the project of global modernization, since the fictional characters are often portrayed as ambiguous in relation to who they are?

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<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of this see Daphne Lawless, "'Craving for the Dirty Pah": Half-Caste Heroines in Late Colonial New Zealand Novels.' *Kunapipi* XXVII:2, *Women of the South Pacific*, 2004, 240-250.

<sup>63</sup> See my comments on Les Murray in my paper for the Riga symposium.

<sup>64</sup> There has been much dispute about whether Mudrooroo can be classified as an Aborigine writer since it was discovered that his parentage was actually African-American not Aborigine and this led to a long debate in Australia as to whether being accepted as belonging to a tribe even if one is not a blood member of that tribe qualifies for being termed an Aborigine. But the condition of the Aborigine people whether in the present or in the past historically or mythologically has been the subject of Mudrooroo's writing as long as he lived in Australia.

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### **Voicing the Experience of Contemporary Emigration in Latvian Novel**

The post-independence period in Latvia has been marked by a massive economic emigration to the prosperous West. While the situation has been widely debated in mass media and society, there have been few literary representations of the experience of contemporary emigration. The reluctance of Latvian writers to engage with this reality of modern life has manifold reasons. The foremost among them, however, might be the commonplace notion that economic emigrants cross beyond the cultural pale into an infertile soil where they can either struggle to preserve their Latvian cultural heritage or succumb to the lure of the global mass culture, giving up their national identity. Furthermore, although emigration for economic or political reasons has been a constant and significant factor in the history of the Latvian nation since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has never posed a threat to the survival of the Latvian language and culture. Therefore the Latvian writers so far seem to have been unable to create a coherent framework for conceptualization of the contemporary emigration.

The theme of contemporary emigration entered Latvian literature in 2002 with the publication of Laima Muktupāvela's debut novel 'The Mushroom Covenant' and it has been continued in the novel form last year with another debut novel 'The Building Site with a View of London' by Vilis Lācītis (pennname of the former journalist and rock musician Aleksandrs Ruģēns). Both novels are based on personal experience of working abroad as semi-legal or illegal unqualified labourers in the period before Latvia entered the European Union. Despite the fact that Laima Muktupāvela's novel is pronouncedly feminine, while Vilis Lācītis has depicted the international male community of London buildings sites the authors share certain themes and have faced similar challenges in narrating their stories. Predictably, both novels deal with the issue of exploitation of the cheap labour from Eastern Europe, but they also reflect the complex cultural encounters taking place in contact zones: social spaces where, according to Mary Louise Pratt's well-known definition 'disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.'<sup>65</sup> However, as the colonial centre for Latvians has never been the British Empire but Germany and later Russia, there is no history of subjugation, resistance and/ or liberation and long-established cultural contacts to refer to. Instead of a well-defined colonial power now transformed into the illusory multination Eldorado of prosperity, the central characters who are also the first-person narrators of both novels are set against the faceless, impersonal economic processes. They find themselves in linguistically and culturally alien environments and have to translate it into a style and an idiom that would transmit this new experience to the Latvian readership.

In Laima Muktupāvela's novel the central character Īva Baranovska frustratingly catches only glimpses of Ireland, the country where she works on a mushroom farm. On her way to work she reflects,

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<sup>65</sup> Pratt, Mary Louise, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Routledge, 2003, p. 4.

‘The path from the house to the mushroom sheds is very beautiful and I must imagine, as a blind person would, what Ireland is like if I enjoy this path so much.’<sup>66</sup> \* Her awareness of Ireland is formed by sensory impressions and fleeting insights into its glorious mythical past that transcend the sordid present. Ironically, language does not help much towards the inter-cultural dialogue. At first, Īva does not have even the most rudimentary knowledge of English. Although by the end of her career as a mushroom picker she has learned enough English to communicate with her employer, exactly her language skills become an obstacle to getting acquainted with some part of Ireland, at least. As she has asked a few awkward questions about the wages and the rights of the employees, she is left behind when her co-workers are taken on a trip to see something of the countryside.

The fusion of Īva’s Latvian identity and the newly acquired Irish experience most clearly appears in the recipes of mushroom dishes which conclude each chapter. While practically applicable, these recipes perform the function of authorial comment, highlighting the insights to be gained from the chapters they are attached to or reflecting the changing moods and fortunes of the central character. The names of the dishes and the texts of the recipes contain allusions to Irish myths and Latvian folk tales, fragments of Irish folk songs and Latvian proverbs, references to history, etc. One can learn how to prepare the mushroom stew *The Truce of the White and Red Roses*, the mushroom cake *Cú Chulainn’s Toy Cupboard* or the traditional baked Irish mushrooms along with instructions on the mood in which the dishes should be eaten. Among the recipes is the mushroom pie *Trimurti* containing meditations on the cosmic unity of all creation and *Purple Submarine*, eggplant stuffed with mushrooms (before eating it one is invited to sing a verse from the Beatles song *Yellow Submarine*). This hybrid carnivalesque culinary discourse underlines the narrator’s scepticism about enforced, nominal integration of different nationalities in the name of economic expedience. The one truly common experience that unites the Latvian mushroom pickers and their employer is the birth of a child. The implication seems to be that human beings are drawn together by the most essential and universal life experiences that transcend the limitations imposed by languages and cultures.

Vilis Lācītis’s novel ‘The Building Site with a View of London’ offers a less complicated vision of emigration. The author himself has described his creation as ‘a good read with a touch of reality.’<sup>67</sup> An element that has considerably contributed to the entertainment value of the novel is the style. In difference from Laima Muktupāvela who has interspersed her text with English phrases but has kept the languages separate, Vilis Lācītis imitates the pigeon English of the builders who have flocked to London from all parts of Eastern Europe in hope of quick and easy prosperity. The influence of this corrupted English creeps into Latvian, which is peppered with four-letter words and borrowings from English. The ‘low’ but colourful language corresponds to the picaresque nature of the whole novel which follows the adventures of the hero from the lowest echelons of manual workers to a student of architecture.

Despite the rather improbable and loosely structured yarn of events and somewhat clichéd mediations of the central character, there are two re-occurring themes that deserve closer inspection. First, the narrative is over-laden with stereotypical representations of the Brits and British culture.

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<sup>66</sup> Muktupāvela, Laima, *Šampinjonu derība*, Daugava, 2002, p.91.

\* Translation mine.

<sup>67</sup> From an interview in the magazine *Mājas Viesis*, April 1, 2011, p. 22.

Alongside with the realistic impressions of London, the narrator mentions popular images, some of which actually date back to the Soviet era and are still recognizable in the territories that once were part of the Soviet Union. For example, the narrator refers to the Russian film version of 'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson' made in the 1980s and mentions that the little house in Old Riga, which was the residence of the famous detective in the film, seemed much nicer than the actual 221b Baker Street in London. Secondly, the narrator is keenly aware of the various incompatible codes of behaviour and values that co-exist side by side, intruding upon each other but not really mixing. In a telling episode an elderly lady complains to the manager of the building site in impeccable English that her granddaughter has learned a number of four-letter words from the builders. The manager who is a Pole retorts, 'Darling, zis iz a faking biļģing sait, so vat du ju vant?'<sup>68</sup> \* In the permissive mood of the novel all the cultures and sub-cultures have a right to exist, yet significantly the former builder finally settles in East London with a girlfriend from New Zealand to study architecture at a university. His Latvian ex-wife and children move to London because she has found a job there. This arbitrary and rather unconvincing happy integration into the mainstream respectability is just mentioned in a few sentences. The reader can just wonder how the qualitative leap from the London squats to the academic environment has been made.

It remains to be seen how the theme of the economic emigration will be treated in the possible forthcoming literary works. Two novels within a span of almost ten years on a phenomenon that has affected and is affecting thousands in Latvia offer little material for far-reaching conclusions. Yet, in my opinion, they speak volumes of the difficulties that Latvian writers encounter when attempting to deal with the theme. Although the representation of multi-cultural and multi-linguistic environments has given the writers the licence to creatively re-invent the limits of normative literary language and both novels have been praised for sheer linguistic inventiveness, both writers have only tentatively sketched in the possibility that Latvians abroad might survive the global melting pot with some kind of identity intact. Laima Muktupāvela's tragicomic narrative ends with a return home. Vilis Lācītis brazenly encourages his compatriots to grasp the chances offered by the global village and enjoy life laying xenophobic fears at rest, however he uses too many safe stereotypes to sound convincing. All in all it must be concluded that a more realistic and unprejudiced appraisals of the theme of contemporary emigration in Latvian literature are still to come.

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<sup>68</sup> Lācītis, Vilis, *Stroika ar skatu uz Londonu*, Mansards, 2010, p.74.

\* 'Darling, this is a fucking building site, so what do you want?' The diacritical marks in the original text reflect the Polish accent.



### **Writing Memory: Translating Identities in Transcultural (con)Text in Anouar Majid's *Si Youssef***

Since postcoloniality, in the sense developed in *The Empire Writes Back*, denies any possibility to restore the older, pre-colonial past and cultures, the post-colonial writer is tempted to advent new theories and methodologies that highlight more on, thus deconstruct, the colonial subversion of pre-colonial identity. One such methodology rests in the notion of transition-translation of orature: a paradigm that may enable the post-colonial subject to negotiate her/his self-construction of identity. The importance of this paradigm stems from the double function translation plays in post-colonial multilingual texts, especially those in which memory is significant to the act of writing. First, in order for the transition from being an orature into a written script to take place, there is a substantial part that the translator plays, mainly, the filling of certain gaps while memory is taking place. These gaps might be filled by the translator's own memory; however, in the second stage – which is translation from the vernacular into a colonial language – there need be further elaboration on how to re-familiarize the post-colonial identity with a language that is prompted to be colonial. It could be argued that the post-colonial identity is now dispersed and is left in the threshold, that is to say, between, on the one hand, orature and its script and, on the other hand, between the vernacular and the post-colonial language. In order to address this issue and explain this paradigm, I will refer to an English novel written by an American of North African origin, entitled *Si Youssef* (2005). As I will show, translating the oral literature into a script written in a foreign language (colonial or global) assumes that translation becomes its own impossibility in cultural globalization. In other words, to transition a memory into a text remarkably measured by its incommensurability retains the act of writing back a mere act of reconstructing identity. What I suggest instead is to regard translation a tool that transitions the construction of identity from the composition of memory into the substantiality of transculturality at a global level. Therefore, translation becomes not a vessel of reading and writing the past, but a mode of constructing the post-colonial identity at a global scale. Transculturality becomes a mode for such synthesis, that is, writing identities in transcultural text, rather than negotiating the act of writing back out of context.

*Si Youssef* tells the story of an old man called Youssef. As the narrative moves back and forth, leaning on the modernist techniques of stream of consciousness and flashbacks, the movement suggests two substantial readings: First is to dismantle the discourse of modernity, and second is to introduce a new form of memory that re-writes the history of the city of Tangier in Morocco. Between the two representations, the story of *Si Youssef* unfolds, but remains a crossroad whereby the notion of identity is problematized. Consequently the gap between history and memory is filled with a transcultural memory. This can be viewed in the ways *Si Youssef* aims to breach the differences in narrative history through his own memories. As a result, Lamin, the recorder, feels that certain gaps are left unfilled, and it is his duty to “transculturated” *Si Youssef*'s memory in order to fit into the cultural context of Morocco. It can be argued, however, that the means of gathering memories of the past should conform to that of the present, which problematizes the notion of the writing back. In order to write back, or preserve the history of the

native, such representations become important in the struggle over historical inscriptions. The importance to examine the authenticity of representations becomes greater when it concerns the question of colonizer vs. colonized.

In this context, Si Yussef's historical experience seems contradictory but inspires a responsibility that supersedes the mainstream historical archive. In order to solve this problematic, Lamin resorts to the space of language, as a possibility to re-narrate Si Yussef's story. The importance of translation emanates from the need to inscribe identity into history, but the language of translation remains the vessel for a possibly re-writing a transcultural identity. When Lamin meets with Omar, Si Yussef's son, in his office, he discusses with him the possibility of writing a narrative about his father. The conversation begins by Lamin telling of his plan "to write some kind of document (I said it was a book in order to impress him) to record my brief encounter with his father. So unusual was my gesture that he thought it was a joke" (Majid 2005, 114). Lamin clearly indicates that the purpose behind such a document or book is to tell Omar's father's story to the world. This aspect reminds us of Si Yussef's plea addressed to Lamin to make remembrance education. Lamin points to this meeting by saying that Omar

believed vaguely and gave me enough respect and permission to record these lines.

It was awkward for him to know that his father reflected on his life with a young man who is not even a Khaldi. (Majid 2005, 114)

This is so because neither of his children is willing to reflect on the life of people on the verge of extinction. The children of history will become fathers of an era marked by modernity and globalization. Paradoxically, the English language becomes the vessel to transfer the minoritarian memories. When Lamin is asked why he chooses to write in English and not, for instance in Spanish, the language that Si Yussef's offspring master, he replies that "because I want the whole world to know what your father said, Mr Omar" (Majid 2005, 115).

The English language offers a significant margin of freedom for the narrator. The English language in North Africa is considered a neutral tool that enables the North African writer and her/his novel to step away from cultural or social constraints. To write a book in English about the memory of the marginalized Si Yussef is to document an era of a place that is no longer available on the map (at least in a symbolic way). Changes do affect territories: countries have been erased and others established; people die, and their offspring emerge as part of an economic and cultural globalization that bifurcates all that is original and pure. As a result, hybridity becomes the only marker of the newly emergent space. Lamin wants to make of Si Yussef's story a timeless "register of accurate descriptions of human actions" (Majid 2005, 115), the English language incisively offers new directions for approaching of the *story* of Si Yussef. Nasri reminds us that through the modification of English, through the insertion of untranslated words (but for which a glossary is offered in the beginning of the novel), and its heterogeneity, "a new life is given to a true interweaving of plural histories" (2005, 31). Since "language embodies the thought processes and values of a culture" (Ashcroft 2009, 105), it is undoubtedly a persistent reminder of the culture of Si Yussef to transform the language this way.

However interesting the process might be, the language “is becoming an unresolved nightmare [...] and generating a guilt whose redemption speaks in a shy stuttering voice” (Majid 2005, 83). The sense of guilt is projected onto the use of an “imported” language, a language of the *Becoming* and dislocated writers. Language thus becomes the alternative home for the imagined community. As an American writer of North African origin, Anouar Majid aims to fill in the empty space of dislocation by writing in the English language. Nevertheless, the fear emerges as a consequence of the language’s inability to carry the weight it should bear in the memory of the marginal Moroccans, and the new Moors. It is an “unresolved nightmare” and a “dilemma” that dwells primarily on the sacredness of the Arabic language, its diction, and the incapacity to utter the unspeakable. To use English might solve the dilemma of the unspeakable, but it might not resolve the writer’s displacement or the possibility that *Si Yussef* may be interpreted out of context.

There is of course a general shift from the question of memory/history into that of identity/language, and yet, I think, they both operate at the same level. The fear that the English language might fail the reader to understand the logic of translating the undocumented historical events is directed toward the efficiency of the writer’s own translation. Lennon notes that in such circumstances, the relationship between translation and the text (as memory and its script) often turns the reader into her/his own translator; in other words, the reader is the translator (2010, 75). Nevertheless, to translate the oral into the written assumes two processes of translation which may lead to historical lacunae and misunderstanding. As a result, it is logical for Lamin to think of erasing such a document, especially when he feels that the interference of the language might contaminate the memory of Si Yussef. In this narrative, it turns out to be a task for the reader to translate/transition these gaps into a less coercive but significant translation, either as a document or as a transcultural text. The English language not only sometimes fails to transmit the narration from orality to scripture because of the gaps it leaves, but it “also screams in a long uncompromising whisper” As Lamin notes (Majid 2005, 83).

Lamin wants to fill these gaps with as many memories as he can, but his failure to master the language thwarts him in this move (Majid 2005, 83). To argue this way is to neglect an important aspect used in the narrative, which is the insertion of untranslated words. This process not only refers to the complexity of Lamin’s identity and the writer himself, but it also foregrounds the possibility of neutralizing the English language, and makes it one’s own. Such understanding could probably explain the word “fill” (Majid 2005, 83), i.e., to fill in the narrative with untranslated words, which may confuse the English reader. It has been argued that to use untranslated words in post-colonial fiction written in one of the colonial languages aims at positioning the post-colonial identity independent of the colonial power. It also alludes to the social and cultural specificities of the post-colonial subject (cf. Ashcroft 2009; Ashcroft 2001). On the contrary, Lennon points out that the fact of translating a local story for the contemporary global English reader remains a process of “untranslation” that shifts the focus of “our” writers (2010, 143). In other words, Lennon explains that in such circumstances, “‘our’ writers turn – may have turned – from the U.S.-based literary-critical scene toward those of competing modernities” (2010, 142) which makes from globalization a choice for their re-writing.

If writing in English “sounds exotic” in the post-colonial space, probably for the “English-speaking” readers it becomes a tool to highlight those mechanisms that sustain the act of re-writing modernity in

the “other” post-colonial spaces such as North Africa. This may explain why the writer of *Si Youssef* resorts to the insertion of untranslated words and a glossary at the beginning of the novel. Who could fathom the meaning “that the story of a new generation would be told in English?” (Majid 2005, 83). As Lamin points out, it is because he seems to become a rebel: to rebel against all that which is national and transnational, to offer a critique of both, the traditional and the global, and to understand all in order to offer a transcultural reading of the past, the present, and the future. Lamin’s fear, as the translator and the “re-narrator” of *Si Youssef*, apparently becomes logical, because the meetings with Si Youssef have been quick as if memory were marked by the assemblage of time and space.

I may argue that the transmission of this memory at the oral level (from Si Youssef to Lamin) and then writing (not an immediate process) might not give credence to this narrative and its history, because, after all, the story becomes Si Youssef’s, as the narrator notes. However, orality remains significant in this transition from the memory of Si Youssef into the scripture entitled *Si Youssef*. The history of Tangier and the Tanjawi people has been documented as part of a transcultural script. Whereas the culture of orality seems to be the space that stands between memory and history in this novel, transculturality becomes the mechanism that transition memory in a global context. It is not the destruction of memory by history as Nora suggests (cf. 1989), but a hybrid space in which *les lieux de mémoire* play a role, through which it offers a counter-memory. Both actors collaborate in the construction of such a document: Si Youssef with his memory and Lamin with his language, and yet Lamin provides his own explanation (not imagination) of the historical events, and translates, re-narrates them in a global context.

I have sought to explain how the passage between memory and history undergoes a process of filling and refilling the void in order for the transition/translation to take place effectively. I have also argued that the new mode of history proclaimed in this narrative either by Si Youssef, Lamin, or by both remains a discursive strategy for memory to appear as a counter-account of the mainstream memory. Transculturality corroborates this process by showing how cultural globalization affects the movements between memory and history.

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### **Displace, Converge, Translate: Maps and Photos in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family***

Since its publication in 1982 Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* has been in the spotlight of a range of scrupulous analyses by scholars interested in the text's generic and narrative conventions, the complex relationship between art and ideology it sets up along with the issues of gender, historiography, post/colonialism, exoticism and the culture industry it problematises. While the critical responses to the book have varied from accusations of solipsism, romantic clichés, political lassitude and complicity in exoticising practices to suggestions about the text's mischievous play with auto/biographical conventions and the postmodern acuity of its historical vision, *Running in the Family* continues to intrigue its readers. Much of this interest, it seems to me, has to do with our acknowledgment of the book's ironic scope: Ondaatje uses irony to reawaken our concern for the relationship between perception and knowledge in the discourse about cultural difference. The present paper is an attempt to look at how the formal properties of Ondaatje's text and the use of visual media convey the dialogue across the cultural divide between Canada and Sri Lanka, and more generally, between the West and its cultural Others.

The book opens as a site of encounter with the Other, "a contact zone" (Pratt, 7) where disparate discourses, viewpoints and identities collide, transect and infuse one another to measure the reader's habits of reading *alterity*. Two epigraphs, which precede the actual narrative, seem to build a conceptual framework for the whole text as a canvas of opposing perspectives, not unlike that in Cubist painting. The first is attributed to Oderic, a 14<sup>th</sup>-century Franciscan Friar: "I saw in the island fowls as big as our country geese having two heads...and other miraculous things which I will not here write of." His impressions of Sri Lanka are symptomatic of medieval Europe's accounts about unfamiliar lands and cultures, which were perceived as "marvellous" and therefore inferior. We may rely on Stephen Greenblatt's powerful insight: "The marvellous is a central feature then in the whole complex system of representation, verbal and visual, philosophical and aesthetic, intellectual and emotional, through which people in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance apprehended, and thence possessed or discarded, the unfamiliar, the alien, the terrible, the desirable, and the hateful." (Greenblatt, 22-23) In this respect, then, the first epigraph projects the perspective of imperial power, to whose possessive hands, as we later learn, Sri Lanka continuously succumbed throughout history: "The island seduced all of Europe. The Portuguese. The Dutch. The English." (Ondaatje, 53-54)

The second epigraph comes from Sri Lankan painter Douglas Amarasekera's observation made in 1978 in Ceylon Sunday Times: "The Americans were able to put a man on the moon because they knew English. The Sinhalese and Tamils whose knowledge of English was poor, thought that the earth was flat." While ironising America's neo-imperial ambitions, Amarasekera's remark exposes the ideological implications of discourse used to explain the world: mapmaking being the imperial privilege, Sri Lankans had little access to the Western intellectual capital and were thereby not expected to understand the nature of the universe. The recourse to maps is also significant here because the epigraph is followed

by a visual reproduction of a map of Sri Lanka, whose two-dimensional flatness extends Amarasekera's words, soliciting our attention to the intellectual density of the optical device and the reading practices it entails. Partaking of both visual and verbal means of expression, the cartographic text is what W. J. T. Mitchell calls an *imagetext*<sup>69</sup>, a composite intellectual construct that brings together image and text. (Mitchell, 89) In this regard, the map, which functions as a paratext to Ondaatje's narrative proper, becomes a virtual *mise en abyme*, reflecting the narrator's very act of writing as mapping, his concern with the role of the tourist gaze in geographical and cultural exploration as well as the convergence of discourse and power that unfolds through the relationship between the verbal and the visual in the book.

Mapping is one of the key metaphors through which Ondaatje organises the imagetext of *Running in the Family*. In the chapter "Tabula Asiae" the narrator comments on the maps his brother keeps in his study:

On my brother's wall in Toronto are the false maps. Old portraits of Ceylon. The result of sightings, glances from trading vessels, the theories of sextant. The shapes differ so much they seem to be translations – by Ptolemy, Mercator. Francois Valentyn, Mortier, and Heydt – growing from mythic shapes into eventual accuracy. (Ondaatje, 53)

Several points seem to be important here. First, the narrator's identification of the maps as false actualises the historical context from which they originate – from Ptolemy's ancient maps through Mercator's 16<sup>th</sup>-century designs to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century cartography of Valentyn, Mortier and Heydt – and the ideological worldview they project and impose. For as Robert Rundstrom helpfully explains, "The meaning and use of maps, is, like all human actions, set in a cultural context of values and beliefs that reinforce, and are reinforced by, the act of mapping itself, and the people behind the scenes." (Rundstrom, 1) Arguably, then, by pointing out the falseness of his brother's maps of Sri Lanka, Ondaatje's narrator both employs and questions Western cartographic literacy, suggesting a link between the mapping of territory and the claiming of land: "...Zeilan, Seyllan, Ceilon, and Ceylon – the wife of many marriages, courted by invaders who stepped ashore and claimed everything with the power of their sword or bible or language." (Ondaatje, 54)

The second point the quote suggests is the narrator's attention to the dynamics of the gaze: the maps are seen as a consequence of a particular mode of looking and seeing, they result from "glances", "sightings". This concern for visual modalities is reinforced in the seven photographs, which are reproduced in the book and set up the problem of the image-text. In fact, formally, the verbal narrative of *Running in the Family* is structured into what, for lack of a better word, may be called "snapshots", brief "impressions" of places and people, fleeting memories of relatives, and most of all, gossip descriptions. Many of such stories have no identifiable narrators:

Wait a minute, wait a minute! When did all this happen, I'm trying to get it straight...

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<sup>69</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell uses "the slash to designate "image/text" as a problematic gap, cleavage, or rupture in representation. The term "imagetext" designates composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text. "Image-text", with a hyphen, designates relations of the visual and verbal. (Mitchell, 89)

Your mother was nine, Hilden was there, and your grandmother Lalla and David Grenier and his wife Dickie.

How old was Hilden?

Oh, in his early twenties.

But Hilden was having dinner with my mother and you.

Yes, says Barbara. And Trevor de Saram. And Hilden and your mother and I were quite drunk. (Ondaatje, 85)

Discursively, Ondaatje employs the aesthetic of discontinuity while simultaneously looking for continuity in the history of the family, community and country. In generating and unfolding the dynamics of memory (personal as much as communal), the photographs and narrative “snapshots” refract one another and thereby enhance our awareness of the unreliability of the narrator’s historiographic effort. In Graham Huggan’s view, “Ondaatje seems to want to see, but also to prevent himself from seeing. He avails himself of the licence of ethnic indeterminacy in order to dream about a past that remains strategically out of focus.” (Huggan, 121) Like memory, whose dynamics, the narrative investigates and reiterates, *Running in the Family* both brings Sri Lanka closer to the reader and distorts its form. The “mythic” quality of the stories about the narrator’s father and his native land is mirrored in the photographic images. In one of them, attributed to the chapter “Asian Rumours”, we see a blurred view of a promenade, with indistinct (and thus anonymous) human figures walking down the road. In the background the houses look like country estate buildings suggestive of imperial presence. Although a materialized memory trace, the photo remains silent about the reality it depicts and the people who inhabit it remain genuinely unknowable, a source of gossip, an anecdote. Perhaps it is fitting to remember Sontag’s note that “Through photographs the world becomes a series of unrelated, freestanding particles; and history, past and present, a set of anecdotes and *fait divers*.” (Sontag, 22-23)

Photos, much like maps, pose an epistemological problem, which is another implication the narrator makes in commenting on his brother’s cartographic collection. By comparing the maps of Ceylon to portraits, Ondaatje argues for the complicity of visual logic and interpretative strategies that are encoded in them. Visual texts make demands not just on the eyes, but also on the whole intellectual apparatus that is imposed on them as a lens that guides the gaze and organises the optical forms into cognitive material. As John Berger obligingly puts it,

Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the possible sights. This is true even in the most casual family snapshot. The photographer’s way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject... Yet, although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing. (Berger, 10)

Visual documents of reality, both maps and photos in *Running in the Family* entice the reader’s eye so as to caution us against mimetic reading and to expose the ideological paradigms that condition our



knowledge of Sri Lanka. Ondaatje is mapping the Western consciousness and its perception of Sri Lanka, at the same time as he is mapping his family history and the very process of writing: “How I have used them... They knit the story together, each memory a wild thread in the sarong... I would love to photograph this.” (Ondaatje, 90) The novel effectively becomes a map envisioning a territory of the mind’s eye. In this sense it works as a visual, as much as verbal, reconstruction of memory. By extension, then, Ondaatje’s narrator is as much a historian as a photographer in that both describe a lost world, for as Sontag demonstrates, “All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability.” (Sontag, 15)

In so far as Ondaatje’s text is a viewing, as much as a reading, experience, his reader operates as an embodied eye. Significantly, the narrator writes for the eye sensitive to the legacy of colonial discourse. The memory of imperial conquest is projected through numerous intertextual references to Western artists, like Paul Bowles, D.H. Lawrence, Leonard Woolf, and Edward Lear, to name but a few, whose authority on the subject of Sri Lanka was sustained as much by their actual experience of the island as by the “imperial eyes” (to borrow Pratt’s phrasing) whose ethics they used in their observations about cultural difference. For example, Woolf sums up his experience in a nutshell: “All jungles are evil.” (Ondaatje, 65) Lawrence appears to be equally economical with words: “...Ceylon is an experience – but heavens, not a permanence.” (ibid.) Much like the epigraph from Oderic these “alien tongues” project a view of the island as a dangerous and possibly savage place only to be rebutted in Ondaatje’s quoting of Lakdasa Wikkramasinha’s poem:

Don’t talk to me about Matisse...  
the European style of 1900, the tradition of the studio  
where the nude woman reclines forever  
on a sheet of blood  
Talk to me instead of the culture generally –  
how the murderers were sustained  
by the beauty robbed of savages: to our remote  
villages the painters came, and our white-washed  
mud-huts were splattered with gunfire. (Ondaatje, 71)

This ekphrastic poem evokes the visual template of Orientalist painting with the central figure of the Odalisque metonymically giving access to the Western epistemological discourse about the East. In other words, Matisse’s name, although linked to the many Odalisques the Fauvist painted, stands in for the whole paradigm of Western thought and aesthetic practice (Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres and Leon Gerome also spring to mind) that contributed to the idea of imperial domination “fundamental to eighteenth and nineteenth century understandings of the East as exotic, ornate and mysterious.” (Quiazon, 50) Wikkramasinha’s poem invokes the violence of imperial oppression, which echoes in Ondaatje’s memories of the Insurgency of 1971: “When the government rounded up thousands of suspects during the Insurgency of 1971, the Vidyalkara campus of the University of Ceylon was turned into a prison camp.” (Ondaatje, 70) Ironically, though, here the “white-washed mud-

huts... splattered with gunfire” are translated into “walls” and “ceilings” covered in “quatrains and free verse about the struggle, tortures [and] the unbroken spirit” (Ondaatje, 70) of the Sri Lankan people. Poetry, like pictorial art, here provides a medium of resistance against the constraints of oppressive ideologies.

The self-conscious activity of *writing* is at the heart of the book, metaphorised as it is in the process of mapping. This brings us to the last implication in the narrator’s contemplation of his brother’s maps. Ondaatje calls them “translations”, which attempt to balance the “mythic” and the “accurate”. At one point, Sri Lanka is likened to a mirror, an interpreting mechanism that “pretended to reflect each European power till newer ships arrived and spilled their nationalities, some of whom stayed and intermarried...” (Ondaatje, 54) Effectively, as a site of cultural encounters and a testing ground for the Western reader’s perception of Sri Lanka as the cultural Other, *Running in the Family* operates as an endeavour to translate Sri Lankan reality into a Canadian narrative, the past into present, absence into presence, gossip into fact, the private into the public and vice versa. The formal convergence of the visual with the verbal, which creates the problem of the *image-text*, reflects the network of interlocking ideological relations that attenuate the narrator’s (and by extension, readers’) access to the discursive territory of Sri Lanka.

The ambiguity of the translating act as simultaneously constitutive of *confusion*, *transmission* and *production* (Godard, 87) may account for the numerous critical observations about Ondaatje’s complicity in the exoticising of Sri Lanka. The narrator’s collection of intertextual (and intermedial) traces against which his own discourse is measured is suggestive of his Trickster-like approach to storytelling. His interest in myth and gossip may be linked to the figure of *thalagoya*, a Sri Lankan sub-aquatic monitor: “The thalagoya has a rasping tongue that “catches” and hooks objects. There is a myth that if a child is given thalagoya tongue to eat he will become brilliantly articulate, will always speak beautifully, and in his speech be able to “catch” and collect wonderful, humorous information.” (Ondaatje, 61) The thalagoyan tongue seems to provide a metaphor for the narrator’s own narrative technique, keen as he is on “catching” stories and “captivating” his reader with verbal and visual “marvels”. Not least among these are descriptions of places and wildlife: “To jungles and gravestones... Watched leopards sip slowly, watched the crow sitting restless on his branch peering about with his beak open. Have seen the outline of a large fish caught and thrown in the curl of a wave...” (Ondaatje, 58) Grandmother Lalla is similarly described as part of Nature: “My grandmother died in the blue arms of a jacaranda tree. She could read thunder.” (Ondaatje, 93) As Huggan aptly notes, Ondaatje’s travelogue taps into Western sensibility and he “heightens the effect by drawing on the estranging force of the European exotic.” (Huggan, 121)

Yet, the book’s exoticist appeal is not without irony. In fact, perhaps Ondaatje’s ironies come as a result of the complexity of cultural translation. Notably, the narrator himself partakes of the psychological discomfort and ironic ambivalence that seems to characterise the experience of transculturation: “I am the foreigner. I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner.” (Ondaatje, 65) His sense of cultural ambivalence is reinforced in an episode where Sinhalese actors playing Arthurian characters are photographed in the house of a former Prime Minister:

While we eat, an amateur theatre group from Colombo which is producing *Camelot* receives permission to be photographed on the grounds. The dream-like setting is now made more surreal by Sinhalese actors wearing thick velvet costumes, pointed hats, and chain mail in this terrible May heat. A group of black knights mime festive songs among the peacocks and fountains. Guinevere kisses Arthur beside the tank of Australian fish. (Ondaatje, 134)

Photography here provides both an instrument for and acknowledgment of cultural translation, where the displacement of Sinhalese actors into Arthurian legend results in “mimicry” (Bhabha, 86) that both sustains and challenges the tokens of imperial presence in Sri Lanka. The “surrealism” of the situation and the inappropriateness of the clothes are suggestive of what Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida* calls *punctum*<sup>70</sup>, the unintended feature of the photograph that wounds the spectator: “...it is not...by Painting that Photography touches art, but by Theater.” (Barthes, 31) The ironies and ambiguities of Ondaatje’s narrative may be seen in a similar light as the book unfolds its attempt to present “a portrait or ‘gesture’” (Ondaatje, 176). The interaction we establish between the visual and the verbal media raises questions about whose portrait the book attempts to capture: the narrator’s lost father? his mother? the whole family? community? country? or narrator himself? Here, we are made aware of how photography (portraiture), like memory, hides as well as reveals. This ironic doubleness is what, in Barthes’s view, constitutes the madness of the photograph: “The Photograph then becomes a bizarre medium, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, shared hallucination (on the one hand “it is not there”, on the other “but it has indeed been”): a mad image, chafed by reality.” (Barthes, 115). In this respect, it is as if Ondaatje’s verbal account borrows from the photographic “madness” to emphasise its self-reflective nature.

Eventually, what *Running in the Family* seems to highlight is that viewing (perception, in general) is tantamount to writing and reading (i.e. interpretation). The narrator’s attentiveness to the senses reflects the process of his writing: “One morning I would wake and just smell things for the whole day, it was so rich I had to select senses.” (Ondaatje, 59) Similarly, the whole of chapter “Jaffna Afternoons” is a documentation of the narrator’s sensory experience. Throughout the text, visual discourse sets up both a projection of the socio-cultural universe the narrator perceives and a prism through which we read the world of the novel. Thus the book’s concern for the “sensibility” of reading, it seems to me, unfolds through the convergence of two modes of seeing, *projective* and *prismatic*. I have borrowed these terms from Erna Fiorentini, who attributes them to the visual modalities of *camera obscura* and *camera lucida* respectively. She shows that while both devices were used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to survey land and represent it in drawing as based on the “‘principle of conformity’ between representation and territory” (Fiorentini, 16), camera obscura operated as a substitute for the eye, projecting a fixed view of the scene as “captured” by the “dark box”, whereas camera lucida worked as an extension of the eye, allowing for a more flexible and accurate perspective on the scene observed. Effectively, both camera obscura and

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<sup>70</sup> Barthes makes a distinction between *punctum* and *studium*, two elements in the phenomenology of photographic images. He defines *punctum* as “sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me”. By contrast, *studium* is “that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: I like / I don’t like...To recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer’s intentions...” (Barthes, 27)

camera lucida functioned as devices of (visual) translation of the real into the pictorial, yet, "...the perspective of the Camera Lucida was instantaneous, intuitive, and more closely related to the observer's perception and the circumstances of observation rather than to the capacities of the instrument he or she used." (Fiorentini, 29) The mode of *projective seeing*, therefore, is rooted in its dependence on the authority of discourse that works as a "seeing machine" and produces representations that are in essence artificial. *Prismatic seeing*, on the other hand, "corresponds to the naked eye's perception of the natural object." (Fiorentini, 33) and relies on the idea that visual impressions are "'translated' onto paper while critically examining the momentary perceptual data." (Fiorentini, 34) In other words, the distinction between the two optical experiences lies in the degree of critical reflection on the means of translating perception, which is then accepted as objective reality.

Ironic as it is, Ondaatje's text oscillates between the two modes of seeing, thus complicating our perception of Sri Lankan cultural and historical reality. On the one hand, there is the projective violence of the false maps, historical testimonies and documented gazes of numerous Western artists who visited Ceylon; on the other hand, there is the critical force of Sri Lankan poetry, song, and gossip which challenges the authority of "imperial eyes". At the same time, though, gossip may also be linked to the optical effect of curved surfaces attributed to camera obscura and its impaired vision, in that it is also selective in the registering of perception. Yet, seeing as Ondaatje is conscious of his own ambivalent identity and the traps of memory, gossip seems to elucidate the historical script as a projection of the camera obscura that was imperial discourse. As it is, then, photographs in *Running in the Family* are the discursive terrain on which *projective* and *prismatic* seeing converge, which is why they are emblematic of the book's transcultural reach. For Ondaatje, as for Sontag, photos "are a grammar and even more importantly, an ethics of seeing." (Sontag, 3) Both silent and articulate, native and colonial, factual and fictional, the photos in Ondaatje's book awaken us to the need of a "stereoscopic" vision, a critical re/examination of different perspectives, *projective* as well as *prismatic*, so as to appreciate the complexity of transcultural spaces.

As Ondaatje's travelogue explores the phenomenology of (the impossibility of) return to one's cultural roots, it also problematises the media it employs. By putting cultural memory, as it were, "in the lens", pictorial structures in Ondaatje's narrative foreground the course of reading as a constant encounter with the Other, a form of *translation*, where meaning emerges from the intersection of disparate media forms as well as cultural and historical narratives. In this respect, then, Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* unfolds its transcultural concerns through the scope of its "transmedial" aesthetics and elucidates the obscurity of discursive practices that sustain the vehicle of memory and our modes of perception. Perhaps the dynamics of the different media the book engages with to problematise our interpretative gaze gives a promise of a *hypericon*, not just an epistemological model, "but [an] ethical, political, and aesthetic "assemblage" that allow[s] us to observe observers"? (Mitchell, 49)

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### **Translating Hybridity: Salman Rushdie's Novels in Estonian**

The translation scholar Maria Tymoczko has suggested that postcolonial writing displaying traces of hybridity can be seen as analogous with literary translation, as many of the strategies used by the authors actually coincide with ones employed by interlingual translators who mediate between different languages and cultures. A difference she notes lies in the opportunity open to the original author to choose the elements to be included for presentation to the audience, while the translator works with a fixed source text and pre-given cultural elements.

The implied reader of such a postcolonial text is likely to be a participant in the postcolonial situation who has access both to the language and culture of the colonizer, which presumably determine the macro-format of the text, as well as the hybridity-creating component, i.e. lexical elements or culture-specific referents that can be immediately detected in the text together with possible underlying patterns of text organization and cultural notions that may inform its structure. A reader who does not share the experience of all the cultures involved may experience the text as partially inaccessible or opaque. The privileging of the reader with the cultural and linguistic competence required for the particular text can be seen as a tool empowering those who have acquired the competence as part of their own heritage, or else respected the culture and language enough to find them worth the effort to be studied.

At the same time, however, it may be asked what will happen to the hybrid text, should it be translated into another language and culture not involved in the original situation. Will the translator's approach to the different threads in the fabric be differentiated and what is the possible rationale for the approach? Do the solutions primarily depend on the translational norms of the target culture or can they rather be explained by the individual choices of the translator? This paper attempts to approach the issues arising in connection with such interlingual and intercultural transfer by discussing the translations of Salman Rushdie's novels *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* into Estonian.

The choice of Rushdie's works may seem fairly obvious, considering his renowned celebration of hybridity and the already existing analyses of his works, such as G. J. V. Prasad's reading of *Midnight's Children* as a literary text bearing characteristics of translation, such as code-switching and code-mixing, as well as deviations from standard English. At the same time, it should be noted that the material from among which the choice has been made is fairly limited, making Rushdie virtually the only author of markedly hybrid texts represented with two works in Estonian translation and thus allowing conclusions to be drawn on the basis of more than a single isolated example. This may be considered an indicator of some significance as regards the publishing scene in Estonia where it is rather the literary presence of the UK and the US (interestingly, in favour of the former) that dominates the translation market. In case of Rushdie it can certainly be claimed that it is his acceptance by the centres of cultural capital that has given a boost to the commissioning of the translations that both are products of the 21st century. *Midnight's Children*, a tale of India's independence that decisively undermined the

British Empire, first appeared in 1981; the Estonian translation *Kesköö lapsed* by Aet Varik came out as recently as 2009. *The Moor's Last Sigh* was first published in 1995, in the middle of Rushdie's nearly decade-long *fatwā*-years that also saw the breaking up of the Soviet empire in 1991. The Estonian translation by Kersti Unt titled *Mauri viimne ohe* was published in 2001 and was reprinted in 2008. Both translators are well known, among other things as nominees for the annual literary translation prize of the Estonian Cultural Endowment.

It can thus be seen that Estonian publishers who have been operating unhampered by censorship requirements and state-prescribed quota for 20 years already have not exactly jumped at the chance of translating Rushdie. A reason for that may lie in the recent lack of prestigious prizes awarded to his books, while fresh Man Booker winners have been translated with speed: Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* that first appeared in 2008 was published in Estonian translation in the following year, in 2009, and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* demonstrated a similar pattern with the years 2006 and 2007, respectively. This would certainly once again testify the importance of the imperial centre in the role of the gatekeeper as regards the spread of literatures in English in translation. Yet Rushdie could still be presumed to be sufficiently well known a name in order for publishers to want to have it on their list; thus, the internal resistance of his texts to translation might also be a factor to be considered. In the following, the translations themselves are observed in the light of insights offered by Descriptive Translation Studies.

Within the framework of the latter, José Lambert and Hendrik van Gorp have suggested a model for describing translations with a focus on reading target texts against the source texts. The four-stage model includes observations about preliminary (i.e., mostly paratextual) information, followed by the discussion of macro-level (concerning the structure of the text) and micro-level (concerning the information on word choice, grammar, perspective and modality), with a synthesizing comparison of the findings of previous levels as the final stage. The present discussion proceeds from the Lambert-Gorp model, while mostly focussing on the phenomena observable on the first and third levels, as these seem to be most important as regards the questions posed above.

The significance of the presence and function of paratextual features tailored to present the work to a particular audience is generally recognized. The target text reader for whom the translation is the first meeting with the text – and maybe also with the author – in question is likely to find the initial image of it on the impression rendered by paratextual elements. The Estonian version of *The Moor's Last Sigh* is first framed by the series in which it was published, titled *Moodne aeg* („modern time“). The series mostly involves works by European and American authors and the title stresses the contemporaneity, presumable cutting-edge quality of the fiction included. *Midnight's Children* is part of the same publisher's parallel, also mostly Eurocentric, series *20. sajandi klassika* („20th century classics“), which accords the novel the status of canonicity. While the temporal and status facets that might appeal to the prospective reader interested in the newest or the best are highlighted, neither novel is presented as a representative of a specific culture, location, or mixture of these. The covers do not employ any particular visual images, but conform to the laconic designs of the series. Such framing certainly saves the novels from the danger of ghettoization and the ensuing state of being ignored that Rushdie has commented on in connection of what he has termed Commonwealth literature, and

reassures the Estonian readers that they are about to pick up an important mainstream author of unquestioned international reputation, yet omits the possible connotation of resistance, of alternative modes of expression.

The use of paratextual devices in explaining the text's background and cultural context constitutes a significant difference between original post-colonial writing and literary translation, as the former does not usually resort to meta-level explanatory devices, as has been pointed out by Maria Tymoczko. Indeed, no explanatory notes or glossaries have been added to Rushdie's novels by the author. Withholding comments poses hybridity as a legitimate condition of language as well as the culture embracing the language, while comments and glosses single out a proportion of the text as alien, exotic deviations from the norm that should be clarified. On the other hand, the strategy of hiding the incomprehensible element by assimilating techniques, striving for a fluent monolingual target text which generally tends to be the norm in Estonian literary translation, contradicts the deliberately recalcitrant intentions of the source text. Thus, it can be asked to which extent the cultural and linguistic polyphony becomes foregrounded by explicit commentary in translation.

Both translations include translators' afterwords, which in Estonia is an indicator of the prestige of the source text in the target culture, rather than a sign of its alienness or complexity. The translations are provided with sets of footnotes, and, in case of *Midnight's Children*, also a glossary. Assimilative strategies do not dominate either translation, but tend to occur more often in that of *The Moor's Last Sigh* that, for instance, occasionally omits an Indian word if there has been an English-language explanatory phrase next to it, may not employ foreignizing suffixes (e.g., Gandhi *pro* Gandhiji), and tends to divide compounds including the component „-wallah“ into several notional words in Estonian. Occasional single lexical items have also been translated into their supposedly equivalent concepts in Estonian. In case of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the strategies for dealing with the unfamiliar lexical items and cultural concepts seem to be inconsistent, as if there had been no predetermined approach on the part of the translator. In comparison, the translation of *Midnight's Children* seems to be more systematic and considered. The translation prefers retaining unfamiliar lexical elements in the text, occasionally combining these in hyphenated phrases with notional words in Estonian. However, the reason here is probably not semantic, but appears to lie in the agglutinative character of Estonian that requires the use of affixes, which may turn out to be inconvenient with foreign stems. The semantic side of the non-English lexical material is taken care of by the glossary at the end, which allows for a seamless, albeit more opaque, reading experience, uninterrupted by explanatory in-text phrases. Also, the translator finishes her afterword with the remark that she has deliberately attempted to minimize the presence of italics – a typographic requirement in Estonia for presenting lexical borrowings – in the text, thus visually diminishing the highlighting of non-Estonian TT (non-English ST) words that makes a part of the text stand out as the Other. As regards grammar, standard Estonian is favoured by both translators, which makes the translations conform to the norm of fluency important for a minor language intent on preserving its status in a globalizing world.

It appears that the translations do not strive for a predominant domestication of Rushdie for Estonian audiences, but attempt to find a middle way between the works' impact on a monocultural source text reader and the information provided by a meticulously commented and glossed version. The



solutions differ, with the more recent translation being more systematic, initially allowing for a more difficult reading experience during the bulk of the text, yet providing more insight in the source cultures with the help of the glossary in the end. The differences between the translations certainly do not stem from the publisher's preferences as they were produced by the same publishing house. It rather seems that the more thoroughly considered solution on the later translator's part is indicative of the increased awareness and acceptance of literary and cultural hybridity in Estonia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which urges translators to make conscious preliminary decisions regarding the interlingual and intercultural rendering of material bearing its traces.

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### **Generic Hybridity in Githa Hariharan's First Three Novels: Embedded Storytelling as a Strategy**

In his influential article "The Storyteller" (1936), Walter Benjamin outlines the demise of storytelling; its reasons and its consequences. Apart from social changes, which have unfavourable impacts on storytelling, one major reason for the disinterest in storytelling, Benjamin asserts, is the rise of the novel. The novel presents an approach to the narrated events, which fits badly with a storytelling tradition.

Storytelling centres on experience that the teller conveys to the narratee. Parting with experience, her/his own or someone else's, the storyteller conveys the experience of the narratee, Benjamin argues. By contrast, the novel is born in individual isolation and the writer does not address her/his concerns as exemplary (Benjamin 2002 [1936]: 146). This individual is isolated and neither receives nor offers counsel, which is a pivotal ingredient in storytelling.

Githa Hariharan's work gains interest in this context, because she places traditional oral storytelling, where characters tell stories to each other in order to counsel, teach, and entertain, within the novel genre. This embedded storytelling abides by the rules for storytelling and the embedded storytellers refrain from contextualisation, explanation, interpretation or psychological framing. Placed within the most explanatory and interpretive genres of all, the novel, the inserted stories create a standstill in the narrative flow, obstructing the plot from unfolding. This tension in the narrative audience between a listener to a story and a reader of a novel is constantly present in Hariharan's novels and can easily result in reader alienation or "othering of the novel reader", since a plot-oriented reader of a novel generally requires some sort of explanation for why the implied author parts with a particular bit of information or a story; there has to be some sort of connection between the universality of the story and the individuality of the plot. However, this is precisely what a storyteller refuses to do. When these connections are lacking, as they often are in Hariharan's novels, it obliges the reader to construct a psychological frame for the story. A listener to storytelling assimilates the story into her/his experiences, but these embedded stories are dissimilar to oral storytelling, which only addresses a listener. The novel reader cannot assume the listener position, since the narratee, that is, another character in the novel, occupies it. Even though Hariharan's embedded storytellers address both their narratee and the reader, they give precedence to the former. Hence, the novel reader is required to assimilate the story into someone else's (the narratee's) experiences in order to contextualise the story within the story world of the novel. Consequently, reader empathy and identification are not as easily obtained, when the reader labours to connect the inserted stories to the plot. This calls for a very flexible reader who is disposed to accommodate both the register of storytelling and that of the novel. This is a demanding reader-position and even more so in a cross-cultural reader-position.

Reading the novels as composite centralises on the storytelling, which is seen as an endemic organising principle, connecting the different parts of the novels into a coherent whole as a composite novel. Thereby the very feature, which creates a sense of alienation, is centralised and scrutinised

instead of marginalised, and the questions of how storytelling works in the novels and what it means for the overall understanding of the novels are targeted. In addition, Hariharan's extensive use of literary techniques like mirroring, doubling characters, metonymy and allegory connects the narrative levels and permeates all aspects of how time, mood, voice, structure and thematic issues are presented. This constant linking of characters and settings or temporally displaced events creates an all-encompassing web, which also supports the coherence of the composite novels.

### **Generic hybridity in Indian literature**

Briefly looking at how Hariharan's embedded stories and multiple narrative levels relate to some literary conventions in traditional Indian genres enables us to reflect on commonalities regarding embedded storytelling. I suggest that all three examples below display relationships between the embedded parts and the composite whole, which are also present in Hariharan's use of embedded storytelling. The examples should not be understood as a trajectory or direct influence, but seen as dominant aspects of how embedded storytelling function in central texts within the Indian classical canon. Firstly, in Hariharan's work the embedded story influences the way the framing narrative of the story is interpreted. The mirroring highlights one particular understanding of the context in which the embedded story is enmeshed. This is a familiar device from traditional genres in Indian literature, Ramanujan observes (Ramanujan 1990: 48-49). It is present, for example, in the metalevel commentary that is often inserted as instructions to describe the stories' or verses' origin or how a reader/listener benefits from listening to them. This "selling" of the story often guides the reader/listener onto a particular interpretative path. Many of Hariharan's embedded storytellers strive to convince their audience of the benefits of the story, thus advocating a particular understanding of the story for both the narrative and authorial audience.

Secondly, Classical Tamil poetry or *Caṅkam* follows a strict grammar of imagery where landscape, flowers, seasons, animals and so on denote particular feelings or situations. Thus, the exterior landscape mirrors an interior emotional landscape. Analogy and metonymy rather than metaphor characterises this poetry, Ramanujan argues. The dramatis persona is placed in the scenery, and "what the man has, he is[. T]he landscape which he owns, in which he lives re-presents him: it is his *property* in more senses than one" (Ramanujan 1990: 50). These formalised conventions and traditions make poetry a second language, where the landscapes, the personae and moods are moulded together to a language (poetry) within language (Classical Tamil). The relationship between the container and the contained is a continuum where both reflect each other; the poetic language reflects Classical Tamil and vice versa. Ramanujan describes it as a microcosm, which is both within and like the macrocosm (Ramanujan 1990: 51).

Thirdly, the embedded stories, for instance, in Indian epics are often metonymical mirrorings of the frame story as is the case of the story about *Nala* and *Damayantī* set in the midst of the family feud in the *Mahābhārata* and mirroring *Yudhiṣṭhira*'s situation, who also appears as the narratee of the story (Ramanujan 1990: 48-49, 51; see also Smith 1992: 13-32). J.D. Smith warns against inferring too much from the thematic comparisons but concedes, nonetheless, that the story about *Nala* would not have been told had it not been for the predicaments in *Yudhiṣṭhira*'s situation (Smith 1992: 15). This

emphasises another aspect of storytelling, where the story is initiated by the state of affairs on the primary narrative level and the narratee's disposition to the story. Thus, the possibility of a success and influencing the narratee as intended depends on the storyteller's ability to choose a story to which the narratee is receptive. That the ethical dimensions are central to Hariharan is clear and she addresses the question regarding the storyteller's responsibility in the story "Bhai K Makes a Comeback" in the children's book *The Winning Team* (2004). This storyteller loses his audience, because he is unable to tell stories that appeal to his narrative audience, and regains it when he can tell stories that match the concerns of his narratees.

Hariharan's embedded stories are microcosms contained in macrocosms and they partake in creating a network, connecting all aspects of the novels. It is precisely this link between the microcosms and macrocosms that Hariharan scrutinises. By linking the different microcosms through allegory, mirroring, contrast, and alternative voices, she constantly seeks to diversify meaning. The instabilities between the characters and the embedded and often allegorical stories install tensions between different value systems. This is a form of "speaking otherwise" or introducing alternative voices introduces alterity within similarity.

### ***The Thousand Faces of Night (1992)***

*The Thousand Faces of Night* features a traditional marriage plot, where the protagonist Devi marries, elopes with another man and, finally, returns to her mother. The novel presents three storytellers, who all intervene in the narration and tell stories, which are unrelated to the plot. These embedded stories compartmentalise the novel and are told to provoke a change or reaction in the protagonist. This creates an interesting difference between an Indian and a non-Indian reader, since non-Indian readers often have difficulties deciphering the intended reactions or the social consequences if the narratee is not influenced as anticipated, which also result in an imminent risk for cultural alienation in the reader position.

All three forms of generic hybridity are present in this novel, but it is primarily the first, which is explored in this novel. Hariharan's use of three embedded storytellers together with the general fragmentation of the novel emphasise a disintegration of the various tensions between prescriptive and descriptive life stories. Storytelling's quality of guidance and counsel is in the grandmother's storytelling in line with Benjamin's definition. Baba's advice to Devi and the intended message of his stories differ substantially and advocate different, even contrasting, values. If his stories are read as guidance and counsel, then the advice he gives Devi cannot be accommodated by the logic or coherence of the storyteller position. There is nothing to suggest that the stories are meant as guidance, but Devi interprets them as such. This is supported by her wish to learn Sanskrit and her despair, when finding out that Baba did not tell her everything. Baba's untold stories remain without mirroring and, similar to the character they describe, are left hanging like a haunting threat or wish.

Mayamma, the last storyteller, narrates her personal story. This is type of embedded storytelling, familiar from *Arabian Nights*, where a character tells her/his life story. It is precisely the question of how other people's life stories affect Devi and implicitly her mother Sita, which Hariharan here scrutinises. This storytelling serves to explicate the social condition but equally also to guide and instruct the narratee.

Benjamin notes that storytelling always bears traces of the storyteller, particularly the form of storytelling, which is aimed at counselling the listener. These traces, which “cling to the story like the handprints of a potter on a clay vessel”, are, Benjamin argues, the essence of wisdom (Benjamin 2002 [1936]: 145-146, 149, 162). Since counselling can only occur if the narratee’s or listener’s disposition is recognised, this is a particular definition of wisdom, which in its essence is relational, and depends on the other. The wisdom lies in the storyteller’s ability to apprehend the grievances of the narratee and address them correctly.

The main reason for why storytelling in this novel still remains at the margins of the plot is, of course, that Hariharan uses it to show broken illusions and false expectations. The novel is not really a scrutiny into storytelling, but into the discrepancy between the storyteller’s intentions and the narratee’s disposition.

### ***The Ghosts of Vasu Master (1993)***

In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* we encounter a retired schoolteacher. He spends most of his time alone at home, trying to come to terms with his new life situation. As envisaged in the title of the novel, Vasu primarily socialises with the ghosts of his past (dead family members) and the stories they told him. Not surprisingly these recalled storytellers formulate the norms and values of the exterior world, that is, the society and the family. The recalled storytellers (the father, the grandmother, the wife Mangala, the and her friend Jameela) and their stories, or the stories Vasu recalls, all serve to create an internalised set of values or social and emotional norms. As retired and widowed, the discrepancies between Vasu’s lived reality and the internalised logic for his life diminishes the metonymic link between his exterior life and his recollections. When Vasu gets a private student, Mani, who regularly visits him, his situation begins to alter. The presumed-retarded Mani is a social outcast and as their relationship develops, Mani’s situation elicits Vasu to question the limits for normativity and his own earlier choices in life. In vain, Vasu exhausts his repertoire of teaching methods on Mani only, finally, to resort to the telling of animal fables. Mani begins to respond to his stories by drawing pictures. Trying to help and understand Mani, allows Vasu to reach an understanding of himself (Jain 2004: 54-55).

Vasu’s own storytelling stages his problems in an attempt to solve them. This creates an alternative world, a *mise en abyme*, where the tensions are wrought and solved. Storytelling is, thus, a form of therapy, enabling Vasu to analyse his own and other characters’ situations from different perspectives. The stories he tells Mani all feature the animals in his surrounding and even if Vasu’s social reality fades into the background, it is still constantly present and renegotiated in Vasu’s allegorical story world, where the animals featuring his stories find their corresponding characters in his present life and his recollections.

The conditions for the dialogic teaching relationship between Vasu and Mani are laid down in Vasu’s notebook: “If I am to teach, and you [Mani] are to learn, both of us must use this gurukula for self-fulfilment” (GVM 195). Storytelling becomes a more integrated part of the plot, where the teacher Vasu teaches in order to change both himself and his student. The novel displays all three forms of generic hybridity, but Vasu’s allegorical story world, nevertheless, places the emphasis on how the microcosm relate to macrocosm familiar from Classical Tamil poetry.

Vasu lacks the means to alter his social situation, but his emotional and psychological setup radically changes, enabling him to relate differently to his situation. Vasu's uneventful and quiet life stands in stark contrast to the violence and brutality dominating the allegorical story world, where characters threaten and kill each other. Only Grey Mouse and Blue Bottle do not harbour hostility towards anyone: Grey Mouse does not, because he is too scared, and Blue Bottle does not, because he is too stupid or helpless.

Allegory, combined with fragmented and alluding storytelling, is common in many forms of censorship, even the form of self-censorship to which Vasu subscribes. Vasu constantly claims to be merely the storyteller, never the main character; he insists that the stories emanate from the animals he randomly comes across in his apartment, rather than from his own personal experiences and emotions. This allows him to construe his personal tale with another protagonist, which, nevertheless, in a *bricolage*-like way, addresses all Vasu's relationships.

### ***When Dreams Travel (1999)***

The last novel examined feature two storytellers, Dunyazad and Dilshad. The backdrop is the legendary storytelling of Shahrzad, Dunyazad's sister in *Arabian Nights*, of which Hariharan's text is an adaptation and continuation. Hariharan's use of the same imagery, characters, tropes and metaphors as *Arabian Nights* restrains her options of reformulation and places demands on other aspects, such as form and focalisation, which she uses effectively. The two storytellers adopt very different generic registers for their storytelling, which manifests a versatile relationship to power.

Dunyazad's storytelling is subversive and reformulates an oriental *conte* by using generic codes, which pertain to the gothic. It is a kind of "Yes, but" storytelling, acknowledging the power structure, yet presenting a counter-argument. Dunyazad does not reject the expressions of total domination, articulated through the disposal of a virgin a night and the ultimate violence of decapitation, but her storytelling focuses on the characters surrounding and partaking in these events, rather than the events themselves. Dunyazad's detective-like search for the untold stories emphasises the gothic elements in her storytelling. It is easy to see why Hariharan insists on character-bound storytelling; Dunyazad's storytelling emerges in this oriental economy as an alternative with the potential to divulge other dissenting stories and perspectives.

Dilshad's storytelling, on the other hand, is clearly dialogic. Her storytelling is a "No, even if" storytelling. She recounts the stories of those perishing or living at the fringes, those who take the consequences of rejecting the power structure. Dilshad's ability to distort, lie and reformulate is quintessential to the carnival. To read Dilshad as the embodiment of the carnival, vests her with agency to dismantle the social hierarchy. Bakhtin sees the carnival as free from a hierarchical structure, where the distance between people collapses (Bakhtin 1997 [1984]: 124; Brandist 2002: 137). The carnival is eccentric and does not respect distinctions between sacred and profane, high and low. It mocks rituals and celebrates a perpetual renewal of life and death, and, finally, it rejoices in the relativity of order (Brandist 2002: 139). Dilshad's agency and ability to lie dialogically challenge the demands for submission in the palace world.

The distinctive features of Dilshad's storytelling are farcical and carnivalesque. She claims omniscient knowledge, yet simultaneously relying on hearsay, thus revealing an unstable and unreliable storyteller position characteristic of the carnivalesque storyteller. It becomes virtually impossible to discern a perspective or a rationale in her storytelling or, indeed, her intention for storytelling. As Benjamin noted with regard to storytelling, the explanations, interpretations and psychological contextualisation is the task of the narratee rather than the storyteller (Benjamin 2002 [1936]). I will illustrate the characteristics of carnivalesque storytelling with two examples:

The Eternals probably had many eloquent theories to present to their visitor, and in their usual inimitable style. But this is what really happened.

The little girl Satyasama was an orphan. Or so we must assume, though there have been rumours that her parents, a thriving Eternal couple, deserted her. [...] But a few Eternals elders scoff at this theory. They claim Satyasama was from the very beginning an orphan of the city streets (WDT 136).

Dilshad's storytelling is here exemplary of how Hariharan's use of different generic forms posits tensions differently. The Eternals varying versions and theories are contrasted with Dilshad's confident assertion that she will convey the true story. Yet, the latter part of the quotation does not really reflect her assertive pose. Constantly altering the perspective, Dilshad's storytelling yields a destabilisation of truth and lie, honesty and deception. The claustrophobic, threatening and predictable aspects of Dunyazad's storytelling are here in Dilshad's storytelling, whipped aside by erratic, volatile and incoherent carnivalesque elements.

Dilshad's carnivalesque storytelling leaves the narratee free to interpret the story and integrate the story into her/his own experiences, but, at the same time, it reveals the vulnerability of this position, when placed in the novel genre. Intrinsic in the carnival is a disregard for both the narratee and the reader. Ultimately, a storyteller depends on the narratee, and placing storytelling in an arena of life and death does not grant the carnivalesque storyteller greater freedoms to disregard the disposition of the narratee.

Since this novel centres on and scrutinises successful storytelling to a much greater extent than the two previous novels, it draws attention to the third form of generic hybridity, where the disposition of the narratee is highlighted. The success depends on the storyteller's ability to envisage, not necessarily with empathy, the conditions under which the other (the narratee) exists, and to tell a story, which recognises these conditions. In fact, successful storytelling is the result of a process of othering, which the storyteller undergoes. Only by downplaying the storyteller's disposition rather than the narratee's disposition, that is, by placing the storyteller beyond life and death, beyond history and beyond the course of the world, can this storyteller survive. This is, of course, the very nature of storytelling as Benjamin sees it (Benjamin 2002 [1936]: 154-155).

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## On Transcultural Sites in Science Fiction

This paper will use the transcultural relationships in three key SF texts to explore the formation of subjectivity. I will argue that there are fundamentally three modes by which individual identity is constructed, which I call classical, modernist, and postmodernist, each based on a different experience with the *other*. Essentially, the classical mode constructs identity deductively. The modernist mode constructs identity inductively, through interaction, thus constructing one's own identity in relief. Finally, in the postmodernist mode, it becomes impossible to determine a difference between oneself and the other, forcing the conscious construction of new defining characteristics by which to construct an identity.

Adam Roberts, in *Science Fiction*, claims "SF, by focusing its representations of the world not through reproduction of that world but instead by figuratively symbolizing it, is able to foreground precisely the ideological constructions of Otherness" (Roberts 30). The potency of science fiction, in an academic context, is that it allows the consideration of ideas in a literal context, ideas which are concealed through metaphor in other forms of literature, film, and television. This is done through visual cues, like giving highly intelligent species larger skulls, or violent ones menacing features, as well as through rhetorical cues. This, I argue, occurs to a great degree in the consideration of identity, specifically how we define ourselves apart from, in relation to, and against others.

Transcultural theory presents a dialectical approach to identity, in which the interaction with another culture is a critical move towards a synthesis that produces greater cultural understanding. As such, "one's identity is not strictly one dimensional (the self) but is now defined and more importantly recognized in rapport with the *other*" (Cuccioletta 8). I will argue that it is not just an interaction with the other that is important, but how that interaction takes place and in what way it affects the subjectivity of the individual, which sheds light on the concept of subjectivity itself. Transculturalism has been presented as part of "the quest to define shared interests and common values across cultural and national borders," (Slimbach 206), and in essence as a means of moving towards a new understanding of humanity as a whole. "In many ways transculturalism, by proposing a new humanism of the recognition of the *other*, based on a culture of *métissage*, is in opposition to the singular traditional cultures that have evolved from the nation-state" (Cuccioletta 8). However, following Welsch, I will focus on local interactions, in the realm of the individual and interpersonal connections in which the boundaries of cultures can be explored, recognizing that individuals are not simply the product of a great national or cultural identity. Furthermore, these local interactions are the sites in which transcultural negotiation takes place, and thus can be most clearly understood.

Through a close reading of specific scenes, scenes of linguistic and cultural encounters, this paper argues that it is through a consideration of otherness that one can clearly see the different means by which one's identity can be constructed. The use of these encounters allows for a unencumbered platform by which to analyze and consider these transcultural sites. This will be done in a comparative

study of several SF works, namely Doris Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five*, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and the contemporary SF television series *Battlestar Galactica*.

Typically, if one is thinking of an innate identity, identity markers are considered self-evident. In literature such characters are common, characters who do not develop, or whose identity remains static, and those who develop along predetermined paths, set forth either through their religion, or social expectations. These characters are defined deductively, their identity formed based on characteristics and assumptions that are within themselves. Some texts in which this classical approach to subjectivity is evident exhibit a distinct relationship with otherness. In these texts, the relationship with the other doesn't force a re-evaluation of the individual's identity, but rather allows a better understanding of their subjectivity. The interaction with other cultures allows recognition of their innate identity, allowing their characteristics to be highlighted and understood.

Doris Lessing's *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four and Five* offers one such classical approach with regards to subjectivity. The text provides the fable-like story of Al Ith, the Queen of Zone Three. Through the intervention of an unnamed, alien force, this independent, self-sufficient woman, living in a type of feminist utopia, travels and enters into marriage with the King of the neighboring (and inferior) Zone Four. This interaction regenerates an internal spiritual movement towards enlightenment, while simultaneously reinforcing the identities of both partners in the marriage, despite their differences.

The Queen's identity is innate, described through characteristics intrinsic to herself rather than in contrast to qualities of others. As such, her subjectivity is deductively determined. The development of Al Ith moves along a predetermined path, without consideration of the differences between her world and that of Ben Ata. The same is true of Ben Ata, the King of Zone Four. Although they both change through the product of their marriage, their identities do not change in reaction to each other's differences, but rather develop in a linear fashion. They come to a greater understanding of who they already are through this interaction with someone else, yet do not define themselves in contrast to the other.

This pattern follows a religious principle. The idea of the story is for the characters to recognize "the importance of self-knowledge" (Marchino 252), characteristic of Lessing's novels in general. Lessing uses themes from Sufism, a form of mystical belief that she studied from the early 1970s, to connect a search for self-identity (and identity which one already possesses and yet does not yet fully understand) to one's role within society. Both concepts are interconnected, despite their lack of knowledge about their identities, those identities are equally predetermined. Although there is change throughout the text – Al Ith and Ben Ata both develop and, at least in the case of Al Ith moves upwards joining those in the 'next' Zone (Two) – the movement always develops linearly, and predeterminedly. The necessity of this movement is made possible through the transcultural encounter, yet the differences do not change their identity in a dialectical fashion.

Ursula Le Guin's 1969 novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, deals with contrast both between planets, specifically between Gethen (Winter) and the Ekumen, a federation of planets. The protagonist, Genly Ai, is the sole representative of the Ekumen on the planet, and thus, all interaction between the cultures occurs on an individual level.

One of the largest barriers between Genly, the envoy, and the other inhabitants of Gethen, is that the Gethenians are a race of androgynes. Through their interaction, Le Guin discusses the possibility that gender need not necessarily exist in the strict predetermined duality that it is often portrayed in our culture. The majority of the time, the Gethenians are not sexual (akin to the periods of time many animals are not in heat) and in those periods they do not exhibit either masculine or feminine sexual organs or features. It is only during specific periods, called *kemmer*, (approximately once a month) that the Gethenians become gendered, acquiring specific gender physical and emotional traits. It is only through reaction to the other in the relationship that gender roles are asserted, and the Gethenians can take either role depending on this interaction.

Yet, even by providing an alternative gender, or way of describing gender, Le Guin doesn't fundamentally alter the way we look at gender. Even her description of the mating process of the Gethenians reinforces the idea of a duality. She does, however, present the idea that these dualities that we use to construct identity are not fixed or static, but can be altered with new ways of thinking. This is mainly due to the position of Genly as outside the androgyne construct. The reader, through Genly's perception, still views the androgyne as other in relation to himself.

Le Guin's novel also broadens the concept of identity beyond that of exclusively gender. By placing Genly Ai, the envoy, as the sole character that resembles the reader, it forces the reader to identify with his experience. Genly's story is also the story of the construction of his identity. Through a series of negotiations, he learns to see himself in relation to the Gethenians. The Gethenians, individually and in their commonality, represent the Other for Genly. What Le Guin has done has simply changed the focus away from a typical male/female dichotomy to that of a male/androgyne differentiation, or simply a human/alien distinction.

The text is a largely about how to communicate and negotiate with a new type of identity, In essence Genly is altered through his transcultural experience upon Gethen. This change is ultimately accomplished through a personal relationship with Estraven. Genly has to recognize, and accept, that Estraven contains both masculine and feminine parts, and it is only when the feminine side of Estraven becomes apparent, during *kemmer*, that Genly is finally able to see Estraven as he really is. Genly goes through an identity shift, demonstrable in his description of his 'own' kind at the end of the novel, and yet the duality that he uses to come to terms with Estraven remains. It is through this relationship, and his acceptance of Estravaen as Other that Genly's subjectivity is changed.

The post 9/11 remake of *Battlestar Galactica* provides another site by which to look subjectivity. While *Marriages* provides a look at the classical approach, with an innate identity reinforced in a transcultural site of marriage, and *Left Hand*, provides a look at the modernist approach, in which Genly's identity shifts in reaction to his transcultural relationship, *Battlestar* demonstrates a possibility in which neither of those results of the transcultural experience are possible. *Battlestar Galactica* tells the tale of the invasion, and near annihilation, of the human population of a series of worlds at the hands of their cyborg creations, the Cylons. Yet, throughout the series, the lines between Cylon and human are distinctly blurred. Looking specifically at the character Sharon, one can see her attempts to understand her own identity, ranging from the classical approach, through the modernist approach until such point at which she, nor the audience, can distinguish one species from another, the postmodern approach.

Initially, Sharon is a Raptor pilot assigned to the Battlestar *Galactica*. Her identity is wrapped up in that of the military, and by all accounts she is a fine officer. The show reveals, however, that Sharon is a secret agent of the Cylons, and a Cylon herself (despite her lack of knowledge of this state). The audience is cued into this development by the introduction of multiple characters played by the same actor, multiple copies of a single model of Cylon. Sharon herself comes to understand the development after she attempts to assassinate Commander Adama. There seems to be no epistemological method to determine the difference between a Cylon and a human. Despite the robotic nature of the evolved humanoid Cylons, they are made of organic material and are physically indistinguishable in every way.

Although the audience can presumably tell the difference, on a diegetic level no human character can, with any authority, tell the difference. This Cylon/human distinction is further blurred through the relationship between Sharon and Helo, a key transcultural site as they are stranded on Caprica in the second season. Through their relationship, both characters alter not only their prejudices towards the other, but fundamentally change their own identity in reaction to the change. What is more striking, however, is that the line between Cylon and human is completely blurred through this interpersonal relationship. Sharon's ability to express emotion, shown to be genuine, and betray her people, demonstrates that the cyborg creation has evolved to the point of being indistinguishable from humans. Furthermore, they are reproductively compatible, as their relationship produces a daughter. Both the innate identity Helo and Sharon thought existed prior to their encounter, and their reevaluated selves in reaction to each other, fail to maintain the Cylon/human dichotomy, showing that the difference between those species is impossible to determine. As such, using the category of human and Cylon (at least when referring to the evolved version) ceases to be meaningful, demonstrating the postmodern approach to subjectivity.

This paper argues how these three distinct modes of subjectivity function through close readings of those transcultural sites mentioned, all considered on an individual interpersonal level. Each of these encounters requires the recognition of cultures beyond one's own, but the reaction to this encounter differs depending upon the structure of the underlying subjective construction. How each character reacts to the transcultural experience is critical to understanding their identity and how it is formed.