

Beautiful Infidels: Romance, Internationalism, and Mistranslation

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of  
English in the Graduate School  
of Duke University

2010

ABSTRACT

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## Abstract

This dissertation explores the particular significance of South Asia to international literary and political spheres, beginning with the formative moments of modernist internationalism. At the height of the Harlem Renaissance, W. E. B. Du Bois interrupted his work with the NAACP and the pan-African congresses to write Dark Princess: a Romance. Du Bois's turn to the romance and to India forms the point of departure for my dissertation, for India, both real and imagined, offered modernist intellectuals a space of creative possibility and representative impossibility. The fiction of Cornelia Sorabji, for instance, obfuscates and allegorizes practices of women's seclusion, both to refute imperial feminist solutions and to support her legal activism. From the imperial romance to the anti-racist one, the misrepresentation endemic to the romance genre enables the figuration of a discrepant globe. This modernist practice of transfiguring India, usually in the service of a global political vision, is undertaken both within India as well as outside of it. Rabindranath Tagore, for example, interrupted his leading role in the anti-colonial movement to write Gora, a novel of mistaken identity and inappropriate love, and to mistranslate his own poetry, particularly his Nobel-Prize-winning collection Gitanjali. If realism aims to translate cultural difference, to faithfully carry meaning across boundaries, the romances I consider in my dissertation work instead to mistranslate those differences, to produce a longed-for object beyond cultural

specificity. In conversation with postcolonial theorists of Anglophone literary practice, as well as debates around translation in comparative literature, I suggest that we should think about intercultural texts in terms of transfiguration: not the carrying across of meaning from one sign system to another, but the reshaping of culturally specific materials, however instrumentally and inaccurately, in the service of internationalist goals.

# **Dedication**

To the original Dr. Lahiri

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I am particularly grateful to those who have served, at once, as interlocutors, editors, and friends. I thank Ignacio Adriasola for the *espero engagé*, and Po-Ching Chen for the haikus collection. I thank Nishaant Choksi for the *laal* linguistics, and Tiffany Dominique Perry for everything, all the time. I thank LaTarsha Pough for the traveling Marxist roadshow, and Shilyh Warren for the aplomb.

My parents provided the unshakeable faith that this project would be completed. And so it has.



## 1. Introduction: South Africa, 1900-1910

In the first decade of the twentieth century, an Indian barrister established two experimental communities in South Africa: one at Durban, the Phoenix Settlement, inspired by the writings of the Englishman John Ruskin, and the other at Johannesburg, Tolstoy Farm, in admiration of the eponymous Russian. This barrister would, of course, soon sail to India to become the father of that nation, Mahatma Gandhi, complete with iconic loincloth, walking stick, and glasses. For the first few decades of the twentieth century, however, he was just M.K. Gandhi, an Indian in South Africa via Great Britain.

Gandhi's syncretism is usually assimilated within the master narrative of his later career as a nationalist anti-colonial leader in India: Gandhi as the most Indian of Indians, leading an imagined community, an incipient nation, against the massive British empire. Yet his intellectual and political formation, as a leader of "Asiatics" in the specific context of apartheid colonial South Africa, cannot and should not be subordinated to his later nationalist vision. Whereas Gandhi in India fits well within dominant intellectual tendencies, both in India and beyond, to equate anti-colonialism with nationalism, and both with a search for authenticity, Gandhi in South Africa sits uneasily within this framework. Although the symbolism of Gandhi was important for the African National Congress, the Phoenix settlement was razed and occupied by black South Africans during the Inanda riots of 1985. The area surrounding the settlement, now emptied of local Indians, came to be known as Bhambayi, a Zulu transfiguration of

Bombay. In post-apartheid South Africa, Gandhi has been deployed as a symbol for post-racial unity. In 2000, then President Thabo Mbeki reopened the Phoenix settlement, in a speech which quoted Rabindranath Tagore and Martin Luther King, Jr, and he relaunched Gandhi's newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, once published in English, Gujarati, Hindi, and Tamil, in a Zulu-English version called simply *Opinion*.<sup>1</sup>

This palimpsestic, syncretic, and carefully crafted figure of Gandhi offers insights into the various and specific spaces of the 'post-colonial.' The Indian Gandhi is by far the better known figure, easily recognizable even in caricature, as a pair of glasses on a bald head on an emaciated body. As the father of the nation, he is also the figure of the nation, imprinted for instance, on every single note of Indian currency. The South African Gandhi, in contrast, is far lesser known and less claimed. As post-apartheid governments began to celebrate him, erecting statues and declaring heritage monuments, his availability for trans-racial identification came up for debate.<sup>2</sup> Postcolonial studies as a discipline has too often taken the Indian Gandhi, and the formula of anti-racist and anti-colonial activism associated with him, for its point of departure. Yet the South African Gandhi, far less easily located in commonplace constellations of nationalism against colonialism, indigeneity against foreignness, and raced subjects against white oppressors, is antecedent in both chronological and

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<sup>1</sup> Mbeki's speech, delivered at the Phoenix Settlement on February 27, 2000, is available online at <http://www.gandhifoundation.net/currentnews3.htm>

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of some of the heritage and tourism issues, see for instance Sabine Marschall, "An Inspiring Narrative with a Shadow: Tangible and Intangible Heritage at the Phoenix Settlement of Mahatma Gandhi," *Southern African Humanities* 20 (2008).

conceptual terms. The Indian Gandhi is, in this sense, the single, coherent, and dramatically effective resolution of questions posed by the conundrum of the South African Gandhi: who worked against apartheid but not against empire, who agitated for Indians but not for Africans, who was anti-racist in his activism yet entirely racist in his thinking.

This dissertation begins in a conceptual sense with the figure of the South African Gandhi and the romance of his crusade against the apartheid regime in that colony, taking his internationalist sentiments as indicative of and contiguous with the activism of that early twentieth century period. Not the Gandhi who carefully supervised translations of his work from Gujarati into English, but the Gandhi who published a periodical in four languages at once, two of which he barely knew.<sup>3</sup> Neither the Gandhi whose face is identically reproduced on pieces of fiat money, nor the Gandhi whose iconic image now endorses a \$250,000 pen from Montblanc. Instead, the Gandhi whose settlement was razed in race riots, whose Indianness has imprinted the area with the urban area which serves metonymically for all of India, Bombay, but transfigured and adjusted through the local language, Zulu, into Bhambayi. Not the Gandhi whose authenticity is as constructed as it is valuable, but the Gandhi whose confused location and *mélange* of influences are continuous with the internationalism of his historical moment.

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<sup>3</sup> For a general discussion on Gandhi's understanding of multilingualism and translation, see Javed Majeed, "Gandhi, 'Truth,' and Translatability," *Modern Asian Studies* 40.2 (2006).

This internationalism can be evidenced in the long and sometimes bewildering list of congresses happening in this period: the Pan-African Congresses of the 1920s; the Universal Races Congress, London, 1911; the League of Non-Native Peoples, Lausanne, 1916; the Congress of the Peoples of the East, Baku, 1920; the League Against Imperialism, Brussels, 1927; and so forth. These imaginative convergences of colonial peoples are the product of a moment within which empire was very much a global phenomenon, and yet the old imperial powers seemed precarious in their control. Under these circumstances, agitation for regional or communal interests took an international and often unpredictable form. From Gandhianism to the Theosophical Society, from the Khilafat Movement to Kakuzo Okakura's Ideals of the East, the early twentieth century witnessed a variety of approaches to how the world might be negotiated beyond racism and colonial oppression. Internationalist in their influences and their approaches, these movements were also remarkably diverse in how they figured the international and how they attempted to translate peoples and places across vast cultural differences. One of these significant internationalist conferences was the First International Esperanto Congress (Universala Kongreso de Esperanto), held in 1905 in Boulogne-sur-Mer. An ecstatic L.L. Zamenhof, inventor of this ambitious universal language, welcomed 688 people from twenty countries, each of whom wore the symbol of Esperanto, a green five-pointed star. After the singing of the Marseillaise, as a marker of respect for the host country, Zamenhof led the assembly in a rendition of the Esperanto anthem, La Espero:

“On the foundation of a neutral language/ people understanding each other/ will agree to form/ one great family circle.” Perhaps most popular in the 1920s, Esperanto drew a vast variety of adherents, from Catholic missionaries to cosmopolitan Marxists. Condemned by Hitler but blessed by the Pope, and the inspiration for the Newspeak of George Orwell’s 1984, this invented language was intended to supplement existing tongues and bridge differences between their speech communities.<sup>4</sup>

Esperanto’s dream of a universal language was in many ways common to the movements of the period. Internationalism, after all, demanded a shared idiom. When this was not available, as marked in the failure of the Esperanto movement, it demanded a lot of translation instead. This is seen, for instance, in the repeated attempts to have Esperanto adopted as the language of the League of Nations and, later, for the United Nations. In each instance, the proposal was blocked by existing commitments to international languages (French and English in particular), and the adoption of a multiple and simultaneous translation model instead.<sup>5</sup> Internationalism was thus marked by two linked concerns. The first was the necessity of multiple, simultaneous, and mutually intelligible translations, not only across cultures but also between nationalist contexts and international ones. The second concern, which operated in

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<sup>4</sup> An entertaining account of the Esperanto movement can be found in Arika Okrent, In the Land of Invented Languages : Esperanto Rock Stars, Klingon Poets, Loglan Lovers, and the Mad Dreamers Who Tried to Build a Perfect Language, 1st ed. (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Even today, the idea of Esperanto figures in political science theorizations of the necessity of linguistic commonality for democratic political practice, following for instance the work of Jurgen Habermas and Will Kymlicka. For a differently disciplined discussion of these issues, see Daniele Archibugi, "The Language of Democracy: Vernacular or Esperanto? A Comparison between the Multiculturalist and Cosmopolitan Perspectives," Political Studies 53 (2005).

tandem with the first, was the need to figure the international in compelling terms, which required, in addition, the figuration of cultures and nations to each other in keeping with internationalist goals. These twinned practices constitute what I propose as internationalism as transfiguration: a practice within which existing social realities are figured and disfigured, translated and mistranslated, to produce objects beyond cultural specificity in the pursuit of internationalist goals. Figurability refers to the representation of abstract social realities as narrative actants, whereas translation, both literal and cultural, indicates a set of problems around the transmission of meaning across codes. Transfiguration is the mode of internationalism in the early twentieth century, for this internationalism works not to carry meaning across cultural boundaries, but to produce new global orders of signification. In literature as in politics, internationalism aims not to represent political and social situations as they really are, but as they might be.

Such transfigurative work is not, however, invented in the twentieth century. It finds its first instantiation perhaps in the intellectuals of the French Enlightenment, whose ambitions for a European inheritance of classical culture led them to wildly mistranslate the very originals they loved. The title of my project, consequently, is a transfiguration of this intellectual legacy: an intentional mistranslation of the school of translation known as *les Belles Infidèles* (“unfaithful beauties” or “elegant traducers.”) From roughly 1625 to 1665, under the leadership of Nicolas Perrot d’Ablancourt and

Guez de Balzac, the Belles Infidèles mistranslated classical texts into French for the consumption of the contemporary public. They undertook these translations with fidelity to the intended readership of their historical moment, not to the source texts at hand, and they created works that were aesthetically pleasing and well received, if not always loyal to the original text. The instrumentalisation of these translations, as well as their great popularity, led the historian Gilles Ménage to describe these translations as being like a woman who is beautiful, but unfaithful (“une femme qui était belle, mais infidèle”). And the significance of les Belles Infidèles can be noted not only in their continuity with Anglophone translation practices of the period but also in their continuing relevance to debates in translation studies: their early and spectacular posing of the tension between the commitments of the original text and the aesthetics of the translated one.

My own transfiguration here, from Belles Infidèles to Beautiful Infidels, places this dissertation within a particular Western intellectual tradition of thinking about language and culture, about literature and translation. The beautiful infidels of my dissertation may be translating across cultural boundaries and not historical ones, yet the allusion to d’Ablancourt’s project underscores the fact that translation and mistranslation name not only our relationship to other places but also to other periods. To embrace, as d’Ablancourt and his followers did, the fictionality of translation is to foreground the question of aesthetics in the traversing of cultural and historical bounds.

Transfiguration, as a mode of translation which champions the aesthetic agency of the translator, operates as a form of critical intimacy which is reverential and blasphemous at once. <sup>6</sup> To be passionately intertwined with the original, whether in seventeenth-century France or twentieth-century England, is to be unfaithful to that original in the service of your passion.

The novelty of early twentieth century transfigurations, however, relates to the ascendance of institutionalized internationalism in that moment. The influential transfigurations of earlier periods were tied to institutional structures that espoused national goals: the practices of d'Ablancourt's group, for instance, were central to a project of linguistic hegemony that would assert French as the language of all of Europe. With the rise of modern colonialism and imperialism, however, internationalist structures became the foundation for imperial and anti-imperial projects alike. 1864 marks the moment in which internationalism first finds institutional form with the establishment of the International Working Men's Association, or the First International, in London. Immediately embracing a platform beyond race, religion, or nationality, the First International focused its attention upon colonialism in Europe, and on Ireland in particular. The Second International, established in 1896, focused more emphatically on questions of empire, endorsing the right of self-determination and denouncing colonial expansion. Debates continued, however, around the appropriate mode of opposition to

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<sup>6</sup> For the concept of critical intimacy see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1999).



colonialism, and the appropriate form. Whereas the position identified with Rosa Luxemburg prioritized the international ideal of the working class over any sense of national interest or culture, that articulated by Otto Bauer embraced federalism and minority rights as the appropriate formation for a socialist order.<sup>7</sup> In practice, this amounted to debates that endorsed either self-determination or cultural autonomy, but not both, and which effectively fissured the Second International along regional lines.

These negotiations around internationalism were influentially articulated by Stalin in an 1913 essay, "Marxism and the National Question." In positions soon to be adapted by the Soviet Union, Stalin advocated national self-determination but not, crucially, national cultural-autonomy. According to Stalin, self-determination is a component of radical democratization and includes the right of secession, and it promotes the full intellectual and political development of the worker. Cultural autonomy, in contrast, encourages artificial attempts to internally unify a nation, which works to ally the proletariat to the interests of the bourgeoisie. Stalin argues for a global political order based on internationalism, and not on national federalism. Federalism, in

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<sup>7</sup> The debates of the Second International regarding nationalism were split between, on the one hand, "the central parties, who saw national differences disappearing," for "the Russian and Polish social democratic parties favored the interest of the transnational idea of the working class," the position articulated by Rosa Luxemburg. On the other hand, however, "the socialist parties of the national minorities preferred Otto Bauer's thesis of federalism, guaranteeing full cultural autonomy and minority rights," and "saw socialism as the means through which the autonomy of national minorities could be restored." Lenin's position was one of national self-determination but against any federalism or cultural autonomy. He believed that national states were transient, to be transcended by the internationalist solidarity of the working class which would be produced by "a centralized party to educate the workers into the desire for a unified transnational proletariat." Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) 120-1.

Bauer's theorization, is an attempt to bring together nations on the basis of their separate nation-ness, respecting their national autonomy, a method which Stalin forcefully decries as unworkable because of the constructed, artificial, and fundamentally bourgeois nature of national character. Internationalism, in contrast, is for Stalin the drawing together of the workers of various nations *not* through their specific national characters (a trope which is for Stalin more a myth) but through the universal nature of the condition of being "worker."

Marxist internationalism shifted the debates around the quiddity of the nation to the membership of the nation, understanding any and every nation as always split along class lines.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, even within the question of self-determination, there were always two possible forms: "the bourgeois national, and the working class, which was at once national and international." (Young 121) Internationalism here operated on the belief that nationalism was essentially a project of the bourgeoisie to solidify its control over particular markets; in Stalin's memorable phrase: "The market is the first school in which the bourgeoisie learns its nationalism." National culture, consequently, was not simply a project of cultural authenticity but a classed project as well, one aimed at aligning the interests of the proletariat with that of the bourgeoisie. The stance against anti-colonial nationalism found its strongest articulation in the position of M. N. Roy

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<sup>8</sup> "Instead of Renan's question, 'what is the nation?', Marx's, Engels', and Lenin's was rather, 'who is the nation?' The nation was not identified as a single entity, but always as made up of two national cultures according to its fundamental class division." Young, Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction 121.

during the ComIntern (the Third International), who disagreed with Lenin's willingness to work with bourgeois democratic and nationalist movements in the colonies.<sup>9</sup>

This sense of a fissured nation is articulated in non-Marxist fora of the period as well. It appears, for instance, time and again in the work of Rabindranath Tagore, whose novels relentlessly chronicle a national movement led by the feudal landlords and petty bourgeoisie even as it attempts to fold in the bodies and loyalties of the poor and the peasantry. It is also, in a different sense, the nation articulated by the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois. Famous for his theorization of double consciousness, his writings persistently chronicle a national entity divided not only along lines of race but also along lines of respectability. And it is, finally, the national situation as articulated by Cornelia Sorabji, whose writing figures a community split not simply between Indian and British but also between men and women. In each instance, these authors respond to the Marxist conundrum, in which the community consists of, at once, the bourgeois national, and

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<sup>9</sup> M. N. Roy argued that there was a contradiction because the bourgeois democratic movements were "nationalist in pursuit of their own class interests," and that "the relative weakness of the bourgeoisie in the colonies" meant that "the masses should be led from the first by a revolutionary party that would eschew nationalism in favour of social revolution and the overthrow of foreign capital." He also insisted, drawing on Marx's position on Ireland, that the economic dependency of imperial powers on their colonies meant that revolution in Europe "depends entirely on the course of the revolution in the East." These debates, and their compromises, are articulated in Lenin's "Theses on the National and Colonial Questions" and in Roy's "Supplementary Theses." Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* 131-2.

Roy's articulation of the colonial and Marxist problems was certainly informed in part by the specifics of the South Asian situation, but it was more global in its scope than his biographical details might immediately disclose. There is a peculiar racialism in how Young talks about M. N. Roy, frequently mentioning that he is a Brahmin or a Bengali in what would be supposed to be an explanation. E.g. "Roy, an upper-class *bhadralok* Brahmin, was not accepted as the leader of the Muslim *muhajirun*" and thus failed to create an Indian liberation army from Tashkent (134); in explaining his opposition to the Muslim socialism of Tan Malaka: "himself a Brahmin, was contemptuous of all attempts to ally Bolshevism with Muslim aspirations" 147; finally "Roy, like many Bengalis, was hostile towards Gandhi" 149

the proletariat which is national and international. They do so, however, not through the assertion of the universality of work but instead through the search for a term that would be, at once, national and international.

The internationalism of my project's title, and of the works discussed in it, refers to this specifically modernist conception of the international. This is not, for instance, the internationalism of the United Nations, which is more precisely a sort of representative federalism, nor does the internationalism I discuss coincide precisely with contemporary usage of the term transnational. Transnational, and its companion term globalization, are usually used to describe global capital flows, primarily in the late twentieth century, wherein the connections between various regions and nations are negotiated through the universal reach of capitalism: the universal currency here is, quite literally, currency. The internationalism I discuss, in contrast, is precisely the search for a common currency or a common term. As a consequence, it is also not wordliness in the sense of, for instance, the concept of world literature, proposed by Goethe in 1827 but actively debated even today, in which the world of literature awaits only our discovery (and not, for instance, our creation of worldly space).<sup>10</sup> Finally, it is frequently ignorant of land or environment, of nature or of planet, which distinguishes it strongly from planetarity.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>See generally David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, Translation/Transnation (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003). I follow Haun Saussy in separating world literature from comparative literature. We might understand world literature as, in Goethe's terms, the emergence of the obvious — the discernment of a common denominator amongst national literatures which was there all along — whereas comparative literature as an unending search for the third term which would allow two disparate forms to be compared. This is, in his terms, the distinction between a discipline that assumes a common denominator

Internationalism in this modernist frame was the search for a universal term that would hail peoples beyond national particularity: a project of transcendence for an ambitious modern age. It was thus very different, for instance, from Enlightenment universalisms, articulating not a preexisting commonality among all peoples but searching instead to create something that could be shared. In the search for a compass larger than those offered by national imaginaries, enthusiastic internationalists frequently sought refuge in spiritual language, as evidenced for instance by phenomenally successful internationalist movements like Theosophy.<sup>12</sup> Yet if the Theosophists consolidated the international through a spiritual hierarchy and the Marxists did so through an appeal to proletarianism, the field of literature was

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and one which traces the search for it. Accordingly, Saussy proposes that we treat world literature, not as the goal towards which Goethe urged us, but as a starting point, a set of assumptions of what is important and relevant. "The Common Denominator, if it must be." MLA talk December 2009, also available online at [www.printculture.com](http://www.printculture.com) Pascale Casanova, finally, insists on speaking "not of world literature, but of international literary space, or else of the world republic of letters," in order to emphasise that "what needs to be described is not a contemporary state of the world of letters, but a long historical process through which international literature—literary creation, freed from its political and national dependences—has progressively invented itself." (xii) Casanova's use of the term international, however, is closer to what Stalin and his contemporaries would term federalism, for Casanova's literary internationalism is between nations, not through the universalism of a particular term (and certainly not through capitalism). In her theorization, "A world literature does indeed exist today, new in its form and its effects, that circulates easily and rapidly through virtually simultaneous translations and whose extraordinary success is due to the fact that its denationalized content can be absorbed without any risk of misunderstanding." It is precisely the conditions of possibility for this world literature—rapid circulation, translation, simultaneity, denationalization—which make, however, "a genuine literary internationalism... no longer possible." This is not my position, nor that of the authors I discuss. Pascale Casanova and M. B. DeBevoise, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004) xii, 172.

<sup>11</sup> See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (Calcutta and New Delhi: Seagull Books, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of Theosophy's valency within Indian internationalism, see Gauri Viswanathan, "'Synthetic Visions': Internationalism and the Poetics of Decolonization," *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, eds. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005). For a discussion of Theosophy as a global discourse, see Srinivas Aravamudan, *Guru English* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

preoccupied, before these questions of political representation, with those of aesthetic representation. International conferences and congresses debated questions of trans-regional or global representation through practices of presentation: the assembling of delegates, or even of the masses. The internationalism of literature, in contrast, struggled with the question of internationalist representation precisely through a representative medium: the written text. If the Second and Third Internationals aggregated a variety of people from around the globe and then debated the sort of internationalism there assembled, the literature of internationalism worked first to figure this grand collective, not simply to assemble it. The term “literary internationalism” thus refers at once to the internationalism of literature—the circulation of literary texts and figures across national lines—and the literature of internationalism—the figuration of internationalism as a social or political possibility. Literary internationalism is the ambitious attempt to do both.

The internationalist moment can be dated to the early twentieth century, which also witnessed the rise of mass politics in India, the largest mobilizations in any colony of the period. Just as Gandhi’s anti-racist and anti-colonial politics were born in South Africa, and not only in India, so too the ascent of Indian anti-colonialism in the early twentieth century was internationalist in its sentiments and operation, if not in its explicit character. Scholarship on internationalism, even within postcolonial studies, frequently centers on the operations of the metropole, thus effectively echoing the

structure of empire in an attempt to capture the scale and the operations of the global.<sup>13</sup> Beginning with India in discussing internationalism, however, draws upon both the extensiveness and significance of India-related debates in the workings of empire, without elaborating internationalism as yet another center-periphery form. The first Nobel Prize to a non-European, for instance, was awarded to the Indian Rabindranath Tagore, yet Tagore remained peripheral within this rarefied field. Like many international Indians, he was simultaneously central and peripheral. My espousing of India as the reference point for an analysis of internationalism is not because I wish to claim India as an unacknowledged center for internationalism, or as an all-too-unappreciated central trope in internationalist debates (although both claims might carry some measure of truth). Instead, beginning with India allows for and reveals the manner in which, within the dynamics of internationalism, texts, figures, and regions can be central and peripheral at once. The texts of my dissertation, accordingly, reflect this dualism's paradox. Even as my project discusses authors like Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, W. B. Yeats, and Virginia Woolf, these central figures operate as peripheral references for authors whose work, while influential, has been peripheral in the contemporary scholarly field.

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<sup>13</sup> This is, for instance, one shortcoming of Pascale Casanova's model, which proposes that international literary space is arbitrated by and can be studied through literary centers and the Greenwich Meridian of Literature. It is also the structure of Brent Edwards' influential work on African diaspora, which focuses on the importance of Paris to a practice of black internationalism. See Casanova and DeBevoise, The World Republic of Letters, Brent Hayes Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora : Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Fields of scholarship, of course, are not only geographically but also linguistically specific. Consequently, my theorization of translation here does not aim towards a theory of translation in general. This is an argument about translation into English, particularly in the global twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Whereas debates around translation studies are more common in departments of comparative literature, the discipline of English must also concern itself with the problem of translation even as it continues to assert the specificity of each language, its literary tradition, its geopolitics, and its histories. This is not only because of the increasingly multilingual environments from which transnational Anglophone literature is produced, but also because of the central role translation has played in the Anglophone literary tradition, whose canon contains translated texts so familiar that their translatedness is often occluded altogether. Naoki Sakai, for instance, has argued that translation created the idea of national language, which continues to haunt how we work in the humanities, regardless of our disciplinary institutionalization.<sup>14</sup> My argument here, thus, is neither about comparative literature nor about world literature, but about the growing field of what is referred to as “world literature(s) in English” or “transnational Anglophone literature.” The multilingualism of my project consequently follows not a comparative method but an accretive one: English operates as one language among others in this project, but it is English, finally, which forms the object of my study.

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<sup>14</sup> See generally Naoki Sakai, Translation and Subjectivity : On "Japan" And Cultural Nationalism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).



The general understanding of translation as a site of relationality has led to an understanding of translation as a site of radical political critique. Yet my engagement with both ethics and politics in this project might be usefully distinguished from the position which postulates translation as a matter of ethical responsibility to the 'original,' to the material under translation—above, for instance, responsibility or resonance with the audience for the translated text.<sup>15</sup> This is, in a sense, Walter Benjamin's position, as it is of those who come after him. Whereas some readings of translation theory, particularly in colonial and postcolonial studies, understand the ethics of translation as a question of differential power relations between languages and cultures, the fidelity model of translation seems to aim towards an ethics of translation independent of such concerns. Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay, "The Task of the Translator," might be exemplary of a certain vision of translation "as a mode" that makes possible the essential commonality, and not the differences, between languages and cultures.<sup>16</sup> ("The Task of the Translator" 70) "The task of the translator," says

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<sup>15</sup> For Gayatri Spivak, for instance, "The task of the translator is to facilitate this love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993) 181.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, who quickly dismisses the responder or the receiver of a work of art as not worth considering in this investigation (69), argues that translation "ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages," representing this relation by "realizing it in embryonic or intensive form." (72) He then tells us that "all translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages." (75) This is, however, a moment of estrangement from the source and the target languages which leads, however, in the translation task that Benjamin posits, finally towards a harmonization of echoes, of the elimination of discordances:

Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming

Benjamin, is “finding that intended effect [Intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original” (76) and “releas[ing] in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work.” (70) Translation is the literary form “charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own.” (73)

although translation, unlike art, cannot claim permanence for its products, its goal is undeniably a final, conclusive, decisive stage of all linguistic creation. In translation the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were. It cannot live there permanently, to be sure, and it certainly does not reach it in its entirety. Yet, in a singularly impressive manner, at least it points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfillment of languages. (Benjamin "The Task of the Translator" 75)

The Derridean position, in contrast, begins with a critique of this dream of a single, hitherto unrealized metalanguage.<sup>17</sup> In the Derridean framework, translation runs

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at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one. (76)

He uses then the imagery of reconstructing a broken urn, and then that of a tangent, in which the translation forms a line of departure, a trajectory however that is governed finally by the “laws of fidelity” and the “freedom of linguistic flux”:

Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point, with this touch rather than with the point setting the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path to infinity, a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux. (80)

It is, finally, a space of pure articulation, of essence and clarity and purity: “A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.” (79) Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> Derrida’s text is responding to Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Amour Bilingue* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1983). Khatibi’s text fluctuates insistently between Arabic, figured as a maternal love, and French, figured as a female beloved, combining these two at the level of both narrative and narration. For Derrida, however, this

up against what he terms the “a priori universal truth of an essential alienation in language—which is always of the other—and, by the same token, in all culture.” (58) Language, because it is always directed toward the horizon of a promise to the other, ends up conflicting against the essential monolingualism—the speaking never more than one idiom and yet speaking always more than one idiom—of the “I” which necessarily founds itself in the unlocatable idea of a metalanguage, of language-in-general, “of language in the broad sense of the word” (29). Translation, consequently, “is another name for the impossible” (57): a condition structured into the nature of language as such.

This position against a single, dreamt-of, metalanguage finds substantiation within early twentieth century politics. Whereas the dream of internationalism as translation can be understood as a liberal aspiration with a certain universalism as its base, the concept of internationalism as transfiguration might be understood as a quintessentially Gramscian dream with unity, and not universalism, as its foundation. Gramsci condemned the project of a universal language as “not an international concern, but a *cosmopolitical* preoccupation of the bourgeois who travels for business or pleasure. It is a concern of nomads and not of stable, productive citizens.” (Gramsci 30)

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marks not so much the “two languages” of the work’s English title (“Love in Two Languages”) but instead a dream of a single language that would be able to accommodate both Arabic and French. Or, as he puts it more generally: “One can, of course, speak several languages. ... Some even write several languages at a time (prostheses, grafts, translation, transposition). But do they not always do it with a view to an absolute idiom? and in the promise of a still unheard-of language? of a sole poem previously inaudible?” Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 67.

While part of Gramsci's concern is the way in which the project of Esperanto runs "against the science of language which asserts that a language is more of an expression of beauty rather than just a tool of communication" and that a history and way of life of a speech community depends upon it (30), he is particularly here concerned with the laboring concerns of a class for whom travel is not the primary concern. The desire for a universal language is a bourgeois desire akin to for a national language. As with the imposition of a single language over an entire national community, the Esperantists wish to produce "the language of the bourgeois Cosmopolis," and "would like to arbitrarily bring about certain consequences for which the necessary *preconditions* do not exist." (30) Linguistic stimulus, he argues, can only come "from the bottom up" (32), and the establishment of the International is the only route towards the possible advent of a new and universal language. The bookish languages will probably be surpassed, he conjectures, by "the language of the first country to establish socialism" for this language

would become appealing and beautiful since it would express the realization of our civilization in a part of the world. Books written in this language would no longer deal with literary criticism, but would describe lived experiences. The novels and poetry written in this language would pulsate with the spirit of the new introduced life, the sacrifice spent to strengthen it, and the hope that such a life would become a reality everywhere. (32-3)

Esperanto, it seems, is unnecessary because socialism itself will serve as a universal tongue.

Many if not most post-colonial theorists of translation keep the ethics of translation in suspension between two questions: the first, of differential power relations among languages and cultures, and the second, of accuracy and representativeness to the original text. Whereas each of these concerns causes significant difficulty on their own, when run together the result is usually meditations on the impossibility, both literal and ethical, of good translation. In such discussions, the “abstract ethical dilemma” of fidelity-in-translation becomes a question of the limits of the target language (and, perhaps, of language in general); it also becomes a question of skill and knowledge, as though differences between weak and strong languages—for instance, W. E. B. Du Bois’s English against Lala Lajpat Rai’s Punjabi—might be resolved by simply making sure that the translator knows enough.<sup>18</sup> It is the concept of “cultural translation” that has caused much of this collapsed difficulty, for the “task of the translator,” it seems, is never simply to translate a single text, but to translate an entire culture in the process.

Critiquing the trope of cultural translation for its tendency to reduce all culture to text-based models of signification, Talal Asad attempts to separate the text under

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<sup>18</sup> Asad is usefully concerned with the ways in which translation into “strong” languages simplifies, reduces, or destroys forms of life experienced and expressed in weak languages, and he situates this particularly within the context of global economic and industrial change: “industrial capitalism transforms not only modes of production but also kinds of knowledge and styles of life in the Third World. And with them, forms of language. The result of half-transformed styles of life will make for ambiguities, which an unskillful Western translator may simplify in the direction of his own ‘strong’ language.” Asad, “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology,” 158.

translation from the structure it purportedly represents.<sup>19</sup> One does not translate the source culture, Asad notes, simply by translating a text *from* the source language, even though the translation is simultaneously indicative of something about both source and target cultural spaces.<sup>20</sup> The “good translator” critically examines not the source language but the target language of his translation to find the normal states and the limitations of that presumably more familiar tongue.<sup>21</sup> What Asad’s intervention offers is not only a way to appraise or conceptualize the practice of translation, but also the notion of a reading practice that would be appropriate to “cultural translation.” He writes with concern of “the tendency to read the implicit in alien cultures” (160), in which the task of the social anthropologist is not simply to read the speech produced in the instance of ethnographic translation but the meanings implicit in that speech, which

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<sup>19</sup> This notion of “cultural translation” relates to a shift in the conception of culture, from one involving the “enumeration of ‘capabilities and habits’ and [an] emphasis on ... social heredity (focusing on the process of learning)” to a notion of culture as text, “something resembling an inscribed discourse.” Since the 1950s, “a notion of language as the precondition of historical continuity and social learning (‘cultivation’)” has become the dominant perspective in social anthropology, and “the translation of cultures” has become “an almost banal description of the distinctive task of social anthropology.” However, as Asad reminds us, “society is not a text that communicates itself to the skilled reader. It is people who speak. And the ultimate meaning of what they say does not reside in society—society is the cultural condition in which speakers act and are acted upon.” Talal Asad, “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology,” *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1986) 141, 55.

<sup>20</sup> “All good translation seeks to reproduce the structure of an alien discourse within the translator’s own language. ... All successful translation is premised on the fact that it is addressed within a specific language, and therefore also to a specific set of practices, a specific form of life.” Asad, “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology,” 156.

<sup>21</sup> “The relevant question therefore is not how tolerant an attitude the translator ought to display toward the original author (an abstract ethical dilemma), but how she can test the tolerance of her own language for assuming unaccustomed forms.” Asad, “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology,” 157.

are then classified as indicative of the speaker's culture.<sup>22</sup> For Asad, "translating" a culture is not done best through a representational discourse, such as that of ethnography; performances based on presence, such as songs or dances, he argues, are better, for "these would all be productions of the original and not mere interpretations: transformed instances of the original, not authoritative textual representations of it." (159) Insofar as transfiguration is precisely this "transformed instance" of an original culture, it might be suitable for the kind of responsive cultural engagement that disclaims authority even as it asserts its own significance.<sup>23</sup>

Poststructuralist responses to the dilemmas of translation, particularly in the 1990s, have been primarily to argue for including a certain roughness in the translated text. Perhaps exemplified in Gayatri Spivak's translations of Mahasweta Devi,<sup>24</sup> this approach attempts to keep some of the roughness of the translation process in the body of the final work, transcoding a certain disruptiveness into the translated piece itself.

This disruptiveness in the final text produced, first, marks its difference from the

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<sup>22</sup> According to many social anthropologists, the object of ethnographic translation is not the historically situated speech (that is the task of the folklorist or the linguist), but "culture," and to translate culture the anthropologist must first read and then reinscribe the implicit meanings that lie beneath/within/beyond situated speech. Asad, "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology," 160.

<sup>23</sup> For Dilip Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli, translation is a theoretical dead end; they find instead in 2003 that "a new analytic focus on what we call *transfiguration* seems to be emerging." (394) Unlike their argument, however, transfiguration as I am defining it here might be best understood in relation to, and not rejection of, postcolonial formulations which rely heavily upon the problems and engagements of translation. See Dilip Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli, "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition," *Public Culture* 15.3 (2003).

<sup>24</sup> See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "'Breast-Giver' by Mahasweta Devi," *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Calcutta: Thema, 1993), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text from the Third World," *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988).

colonial investment in clear, coherent translations,<sup>25</sup> and, second, elicits in the reader a response which acknowledges and honors the impurity<sup>26</sup> and inexactitude<sup>27</sup> of the translation process.

Yet the politicization of this model of the ethics of translation causes its own difficulties. For instance, Brent Edwards, in his theorization of the practice of diaspora and his discussion of “the ways that internationalism is pursued by translation,” quickly reassures us that his focus on translation “is not to say that internationalism is doomed to failure...” (11) Managing this tension leads to several different moves: notions of articulation drawn from Stuart Hall; of detour from Edouard Glissant;<sup>28</sup> and of

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<sup>25</sup> See Bernard Cohn, Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Tejaswini Niranjana, Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993) 186.

<sup>27</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, has argued for a model of translation as barter instead of as generalized exchange. In speaking of “the translation of the tool-worshipping jute worker’s labor into the universal category ‘labor’,” Chakrabarty argues that there remains “something of a ‘scandal’ – of the shocking – in every translation.” Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000) 89.. To take Chakrabarty’s model of translation-as-barter seriously, however, implies a rather radical consequence: not just shock or ambiguity, but plain old-fashioned non-equivalence. To barter, of course, is, crucially, to receive what you want – but not, equally crucially, to receive exactly as much as you ‘traded’ for it, given the inexact system of exchange in which it operates. The main problem, however, might be the inexactness of the concept: who or what is bartering, and exchange between sign systems or between cultures or between actors – and is the translator simply the agent thereof?

<sup>28</sup> “The discontinuities and disjunctures in any translation, the unavoidable skewing in any institutionalization of *internationalisme noir*, might be described not as predetermined failure but as the rich complexity of a modern cultural practice characterized above all by what Edouard Glissant calls ‘*detour*.’” Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora : Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism 22. Internationalism as translation, thus, has now shifted into “a paradigm in which indirection can be functional – can indeed be strategically necessary in certain conditions,” and we are told that “black internationalism aims to translate ‘race’ as the vehicle of that detour” – although black internationalism, as the book’s readings tell us, is also about *literal* print translations from French to English, and occasionally the translating or not translating of Creole and petit nègre into standard French. (23)



reciprocity.<sup>29</sup> Even reciprocity, however, operates more as an ideal to be achieved than a description of the interchanges of historical practice. Reciprocity, thus, like translation itself, suddenly falters into a model of impossibilities, in which the ideal practice does not correspond to those practices actually occurring under historical structures of global inequality.

The Belles Infidèles, of course, resolved their anxieties about fidelity through a commitment to aesthetics, and it is this felicitous infidelity that I wish to invoke in my project as well. The ethics of the translated text are also, I would argue, a question of the ethics of reading, so that translation as a practice questions not only the loyalties of the translator but also those of the reader. Ethical reading requires an openness to the text on its own terms.<sup>30</sup> When this text is a translation, whether literal or metaphorical, our awareness of the text's desired interpretations is often haunted by our knowledge of the source material. To read the text ethically requires that we disregard our fetishisation of

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<sup>29</sup> "As a model for dialogue and exchange, reciprocity would attend to the *décalage* of diaspora by ensuring coevalness in the very structure of any black internationalist endeavor." Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora : Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* 117.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Keenan has argued for a "politics of difficulty," which would embrace the "openness to the other" that is the hallmark of Derridean and Levinasian conceptions of the ethical. (2) Whereas Keenan's other could be named as "force, rhetoric, guns, or ideology" and calls across a single language (for instance, in his rereading of the Althusserian scene of interpellation), the other of which I speak operates, somewhat more prosaically, in the dimly figured realm of radical cultural alterity, and across the borders not only of the self but also, in most instances, across the borders of language. This experience of border-crossing, of the encounter with the other, and the challenge of responsibility that results, is what we might think of as the political: "the frontier as such, with its questions and answers, is ... a chance for politics, the chance of the political. It is the idiom and the possibility of the other, of the one who arrives." For Keenan, and for the transfiguration model I am proposing, "Any political responsibility is itself nothing other than an experience of a certain encounter at the border, of a crossing and its irreducible difficulty, of the aporia and the *no pasarán* which mark all frontiers as structurally undecidable." Thomas Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility : Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997) 11-12.

the original as the authentic instantiation; to read a translation as a translation requires, however, an awareness of the original which came before it.

To honor the open encounter with the other, whether textual or cultural, above and beyond questions of accuracy and success, is to reappraise internationalist work that is riddled by misunderstandings and poor translations, even if not (particularly) by bad faith. Internationalism, after all, is a situated practice that speaks both from and to. Instead of focusing solely upon the utopianism with which it is most commonly associated, its visionary desire for a better world, I want to suggest an awareness of the receptive other to whom it always speaks, who often (though perhaps not inevitably) coincides with the discursive system that progressive internationalism is trying to contest. Progressive internationalism as world-romance sets itself in opposition to a dominant system within which its imagined readers *and* its imagined opponents already inhabit, and its failure to accurately represent the other peoples and contexts of which it speaks might be a productive failure, revealing as it does the incoherent and fractured nature of the global dominant.

Progressive internationalism, accordingly, is successfully, if inadvertently, reciprocal to that no-where outlined above, which a text's intended audience and aims might somehow stand for or within; and it is also intentionally, but unsuccessfully, reciprocal to an elsewhere that makes its internationality imaginable. And those failures of translation, those moments of betrayal, are indeed experienced most acutely at the

points at which solidarity would be constructed; the achievement lies among these failures, and not in spite of them. The failure is the point: it marks an end, it becomes a destination. And in the process, the ugly underbelly of internationalism, the instrumentality and dubious investments that doom it to such failure can be seen as not something to be worked over, worked through, or brushed aside, but the substantive force of internationalism itself.

Against the theory of internationalism as a practice of translation, I would foreground internationalism as the practice of mistranslation we might term transfiguration, which always maps out the boundaries of where the oppression against which it works comes to a strange and estranged end. In arguing for a shift to internationalism-as-transfiguration I have in mind Fredric Jameson's discussion of the requirement of *figurability*, through which culture can be thought "not only as an instrument of self-consciousness but even before that as a symptom and a sign of possible self-consciousness in the first place." (Jameson "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film" 37) For Jameson, figurability marks "the need for social reality and everyday life to have developed to the point at which its underlying class structure becomes *representable* in tangible form." (37) Allegory<sup>31</sup> then operates as a means of reading cultural texts as forms of "cognitive

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<sup>31</sup> Allegory here for Jameson is "taken as a working hypothesis," which is to say that class must be allegorized before class consciousness can be lived. Allegory is also, importantly, indicative of a temporal splitting: "the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the

mapping," by examining the ways in which a culture is producing and experiencing social consciousness.<sup>32</sup> If for Jameson's Marxian analysis, the question of figurability leads to that of class consciousness, the question of (trans)figurability in the internationalist context marks the beginnings—as well as the limits—of something like an internationalist consciousness (which may or may not be coarticulated with class consciousness). It is, of course, commonsensical and prosaic to suggest that international differences would present what Jameson terms "a crisis of figurability"; what is interesting for my purposes is the ways in which the limitations of any transfiguring vision mark the boundaries of what Jameson has termed "the political unconscious."<sup>33</sup>

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multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogenous representation of the symbol." Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 73.

<sup>32</sup> "...social class is not merely a structural fact but also very significantly a function of class consciousness, and the latter, indeed, ends up producing the former just as surely as it is produced by it. ... we cannot speak of an underlying "essence" of things, of a fundamental class structure inherent in a system in which one group of people produces value for another group, unless we allow for the dialectical possibility that even this fundamental "reality," may be "realer" at some historical junctures than at others, and that the underlying object of our thoughts and representations—history and class structure—is as profoundly historical as our own capacity to grasp it." Fredric Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film," *Signatures of the Visible* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) 37.

<sup>33</sup> Despite the modern, and not post-modern, contexts of the texts I am examining, they still meet, because of their internationalist aspirations, the requirements that Jameson lays out at the end of the same essay for the exercise of cognitive mapping (and hence, by extension, for the use of his concept of figurability). Cognitive mapping, Jameson tells us,

presupposes a radical incompatibility between the possibilities of an older national language or culture... and the transnational, worldwide organization of the economic infrastructure of contemporary capitalism. The result of this contradiction is a situation in which the truth of our social life as a whole... is increasingly irreconcilable with the possibilities of aesthetic expression or articulation available to us; a situation about which it can be asserted that if we can make a work of art from our experience, if we can give experience the form of a story that can be told, then it is no longer true, even as individual experience; and if we can grasp the truth about our world as a totality, then we may find it some purely conceptual expression but we will no longer be able to maintain an imaginative relationship to it.

Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film," 54.

Thus, whereas Jameson's figurability and "cognitive mapping" leads to a reading of Sartre's analogon, my concept of internationalism as transfiguration leads to questions of "boundary mapping" instead. I am, consequently, less interested in the consciousness that is figured in a text than in the boundaries across which it performs this transfiguration. The failures of that figuration mark the *limits* of particular political movements and historical positions. This becomes particularly relevant given that each text addressed in this dissertation envisions a particular kind of internationalist solidarity with its other-national referents—sometimes communist, sometimes aestheticist, and sometimes simply universalist—so that the 'boundary mapping' of each embarrassing failure is also the figuration of a set of particular political possibilities, each radically different in what they make representable even as they proclaim loudly that which they (fail to) represent.

The concept of transfiguration is espoused, somewhat differently, by editors Dilip Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli in a special issue of *Public Culture* from 2003.<sup>34</sup> In an introductory essay to the volume, titled "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition," they state that it is an interest in forms "that lead us to think about circulation and transfiguration, rather than meaning and translation, in the

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<sup>34</sup> In the editors' words, the issue focuses on "material technologies of public speaking and communication" (385), and the essays are distinctive because: "First, they offer form-sensitive analyses ... that do not succumb to the temptation of reading for meaning. Second, they foreground the cultures of circulation and transfiguration within which those texts, events, and practices become palpable and are recognized as such. Third, they disclose the play of supplementary that enframes and ruptures the enterprise of public recognition whatever its object..." Gaonkar and Povinelli, "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition," 386.

contemporary politics of recognition.”<sup>35</sup> (Gaonkar and Povinelli 387) Suggesting an “ethnography of forms,” they argue that it is the circulation and proliferation, rather than the taxonomy or classification, of “varied textual/cultural forms” that should be delineated. (391) They argue for mapping functions, not meaning; for “the functions of indexicality and mimesis (iconicity)” and not “the play of signifier and signified” (395) as the appropriate work of what they posit as transfiguration’s critical modality.<sup>36</sup> Finally referring back to what Povinelli has theorized as liberalism’s “politics of recognition,” they argue that such politics “is always already a politics of transfiguration from one culture of circulation to another” (396):

Focusing on transfiguration rather than translation—the refunctioning of a text as such for different demanding sites—orients our analysis toward the calibration of vectors of power rather than vectors of meaning-value. ... Indeed meaning-value, its sovereignty or dissemination, will cease to command our attention in regimes of recognition, and instead we might focus on the social forms these regimes demand. (396)

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<sup>35</sup> Gaonkar and Povinelli do not, however, simply condemn translation as a insignificant or insufficiently nuanced rubric, though they do seem to doubt its utility. In their understanding, translation is a complex, multifaceted signal phenomenon—signaling the interior content of aesthetic form and message and the exterior political and social commitment to the circulation of this form and message as well as entailing the cultural logic of the circulatory matrix itself.” (393) The significance here lies in that “A form can be said to move intelligibly (as opposed to merely physically) from one cultural space to another only in a state of translation.” (392)

<sup>36</sup> “Thus it is not sufficient to ask what happens to meaning as it is borne across the chasm of two language codes, of genre, of one semiotic mode to another.... We have to query further: What are the generative matrices that demand that things—including “meaning” as a captivating orientation and phantasmatic object—appear in a decisive form in order for them to be recognized as value-bearing as they traverse the gaps of two or more cultures, habitations, imaginaries, and forms of life?” Gaonkar and Povinelli, “Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition,” 395.

For my purposes, however, the question of material form, of material culture, is not that which guides me to transfiguration and away from translation — and it is certainly not an attempt to avoid “the temptation of reading for meaning” (386) which Gaonkar and Povinelli find so detrimental to the study of material culture in postmodernity, in order to read “simply” or “purely” for form. My interest in transfiguration is related instead to a specific textual form, the romance, and the reading practice appropriate to the late imperial moment of internationalism. Consequently, my turn to transfiguration as a way of understanding internationalism is not an attempt to get away from meaning or from textuality altogether, but to get away, if anything, from realism, and the decoding operations frequently used to access and analyze realist texts. My call for transfiguration instead of translation is not for reasons of circulation alone, because genre studies already names that problematic within the literary field. Nor is it for those of figurability as representation that Jameson uses, because I am also working against the decoding operations that he sets in motion, accepting in advance the failures of any figural frame. I propose transfiguration precisely towards a reading practice of limits: of the boundary marking operations of transfigurative texts, the moments which are not figurable, and the impulse towards ‘figurability’ that guides the construction of these romances.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Transfiguration in the realm of Christian theology is usually read from the passage in the Gospels (Mark 9.2-13; Luke 9.28-36; Matthew 17.1-13), a moment of vision which confirms for Jesus’s followers that he is in the tradition of the Old Testament, of the prophetic patriarchs. As his apostles see him on the mount in the company of Moses and Elijah, he accedes to a divine status in his disciples’ vision, in a moment of remarkably temporary revelation that confirms his oneness with God and his atemporal, eternal status.<sup>37</sup> This moment of transfiguration, which the Oxford

The verb “transfigure” and its correlate noun “transfiguration” come from Latin and specifically refer to changing the shape or form of something. Accordingly, to transfigure something is to “To alter the figure or appearance of; to change in outward appearance; to transform,” but, thanks to this Christian connection, it can also mean “To elevate, glorify, idealize, spiritualize” (OED, “transfigure”). It is in this nexus, between transformation and glorification, between alteration and idealization, between changes in outward appearance and indications of spiritual quality, that I posit the internationalism discussed here. Transfiguration marks a moment of idealization that is predicated precisely upon the *changes* occurring in the process, not the transparency resulting from it. It is neither permanent nor essential, but temporary and superficial, and yet it indicates or accedes precisely to the transcendent and eternal, precisely because of its ocular, sensorial dependency and ephemerality, and not in spite of it.

Yet transfiguration of cultural materials has often been decried for its ideological insidiousness, perhaps most famously in the constellation which Edward Said termed Orientalism. Orientalist tropes are present in the internationalist fiction under consideration, but Said’s analysis was not predicated simply upon the existence of

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English Dictionary (OED) glosses simply as “The change in the appearance of Jesus Christ on the mountain (Matt. xvii. 2; Mark ix. 2, 3),” is not however the only or primary usage of “transfiguration,” which also refers simply to “The action of transfiguring or state of being transfigured; metamorphosis.” (OED, “transfiguration”) It is the correlation between secular and ecclesiastical uses of the word, between the mundane and the spiritual transformations of things that I am most interested. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for instance, seems to use these meanings at once, or at least in their interconnection, when he writes in 1836 of “This transfiguration which all material objects undergo through the passion of the poet” and in 1838 that “Say to the man of letters, that he cannot paint a Transfiguration,” referring in the first instance to a primarily secular usage and in the second to the transfiguration of Christ.<sup>37</sup> While Emerson’s use of capitalization in the second, spiritual, use and forbearance of capitalization in the secular coinage might attempt to keep these uses apart, it seems to me that to do so, perhaps even more today than in Emerson’s time, is a nearly impossible task.



particular imagery but its elaboration as a system of knowledge, as “an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness.” (Said 6) Orientalism is a kind of discursive transfiguration which, like the white publishers’ books Du Bois attacks in “Criteria of Negro Art,” converts its referents—Indian princesses or Uncle Toms—into stable categories for the coherence of the hegemonic. The Orientalist tropes of Du Bois’s novel, Cornelia Sorabji’s short stories, or Rabindranath Tagore’s poetry, in contrast, transfigure Indian anticolonialism in ways that are leveraged towards *not* a stable ideology but instead towards a generative and regenerated antiracist internationalism. Their writings may be frequently and superficially in keeping with the inaccuracies of dominant discourse, yet their mobilization of these tropes sutures a certain instability into these transfigurations. To think of intercultural exchange as transfiguration and not translation, moreover, gets us *away* from the task of the critic or commentator as one of decoding the failures of what, following Derrida or Levinas, is a necessarily impossible encounter to begin with. Transfiguration as a paradigm asks us to think, first, about how and what that transfigurative (and perhaps necessarily instrumental) intercultural exchange makes possible, and then, through the (perhaps many) mistranslations of such an encounter—its inaccuracies, its scandals, even perhaps its tendency toward the “hegemony of the homogenous” (Derrida 40)—what such an encounter reveals. What kinds of transfigurations are found necessary for what kinds of progressive projects, and

in those “failed translations” of any transfiguration, what kinds of interesting failures, what epistemic or cultural limitations, are made visible?

Insofar as the transfigurative text apprehends inter-idiomatic contact in unconventional terms, it demands a reading practice that situates even literary language as a medium, first and foremost, of negotiating communicative expectations. In making this claim, I do not mean to assert that literary language is, in these texts, primarily a form of information, or pure instrumentality—not in the least. Instead, I wish to suggest that linguistic choices can be considered as analogous to or on a spectrum with generic choices: a choice of language, register, or idiom which sets and negotiates expressions, circumscribes and proposes the expressible, and challenges the very rules it invokes.

Transnational literary studies today seems marked by an emphasis on genre and an emphasis on translation, but these foci often operate in separation from each other.<sup>38</sup> The act of translation submits to (or flaunts) not only the laws of languages—syntax, morphemes, the restrict set of tools offered by each particular idiom—but also the law(s) of genre, in both of the languages involved. Whereas translation studies seems to founder upon the dilemma of the untranslatable and the incommensurable, genre studies struggles differently with laws and limits. Yet if we understand, following Derrida, the law of genre as posing a dilemma around the arbitrariness of boundaries

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<sup>38</sup> For genre-focused approaches to transnational literary studies, see, for instance, Wai-chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents : American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), Franco Moretti, *The Novel*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). The translation-focused approach might be exemplified by Emily S. Apter, *The Translation Zone : A New Comparative Literature*, Translation/Transnation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

and the necessity of crossing them,<sup>39</sup> the distinction assumed between genre studies and translation studies seems less clear, a distinction already blurred in practice by the demands of transnational literary studies.<sup>40</sup> Whereas translation names the problems of languages interacting across spaces and speakers, genre names the relations between texts across countries and times. Such related analysis requires, of course, a metapragmatic understanding of language, one which views even literary language as a motivated activity, as a bounded game played with particular expectations and particular goals.<sup>41</sup>

In some genres and in some situations, misrepresentation is entirely compatible with a progressivist politics. This is, in a sense, to revisit Gayatri Spivak's critique of Foucault and Deleuze, whom she accuses of conflating and rendering synonymous political representation—as in a proxy—with aesthetic representation—as in a portrait, conflating *Vertreten* with *Darstellen* and ignoring, consequently, the crucial question of the relationship(s) between them.<sup>42</sup> The difference, in Spivak's terms, between a portrait

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<sup>39</sup> See, famously, Jacques Derrida and Avital Ronell, "The Law of Genre," *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980).

<sup>40</sup> My argument however is not to be confused with the ways in which Emily Apter, for instance, combines genre and translation, arguing that translation is itself a sort of genre. See Emily Apter, "Taskography: Translation as Genre of Literary Labor," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 122.5 (2007).

<sup>41</sup> For an example of how metapragmatics applies to the concerns and debates of literary studies, see for instance Elizabeth Povinelli, "Sexuality at Risk: Psychoanalysis Metapragmatically," *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*, eds. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> Whereas Marx, particularly in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, exposed the "complicity of *Vertreten* and *Darstellen*" as the "place of practice," in Foucault and Deleuze, "Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as "speaking for," as in politics, and representation as "re-representation," as in art or philosophy." But these, "within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other" are "related but irreducibly discontinuous." The first is *vertreten*; the

and a proxy, between rhetoric as trope and as persuasion, are the grounds of the claim I want to stake here.

The novels I discuss do *not* aim for the place of the subjects of which, the situations of which, they speak. Instead they adapt a certain temporal modality: by choosing the genre of the romance, with its structure of longing, of anticipation, these novels lay claim to the future. They provide a portrait of the present and a proxy for the future: a distorted and inaccurate portrait of an oppressive present, and an ecstatic and fictional proxy for a dreamt-of liberated future. I use “romance” as the term of choice because it is the genre to which many of the works discussed explicitly lay claim, and because it has particular resonance in Anglophone writing about India. However, the ideological and generic category with which this project might be most concerned is realism. Much like critics who rely upon a notion of realism to theorize genres and modes like romance (Fredric Jameson), melodrama (Peter Brooks), or modernism (Geörg Lukács), I consider realism to be an ideologically consolidated central figure in all modern literary production. Insofar as what we recognize as realist prose operates as a recognizable attempt to replicate our existing social reality, such writing also reflects back upon us the presumptions and modes of thought which structure this social whole.

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latter is *darstellen*; this is the difference” between a proxy and a portrait.” It is also the terms of “a much older debate: between representation or rhetoric as tropology and as persuasion. *Darstellen* belongs to the first constellation, *vertreten*—with stronger suggestions of substitution—to the second. ... running them together, especially in order to say that beyond both is where oppressed subjects speak, act, and know *for themselves*, leads to an essentialist, utopian politics.” Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 275-77.

Particularly in the early twentieth-century moment under discussion, realism is “not one style among others, it is the basis of literature; all styles (even those seemingly most opposed to realism) originate in it or are significantly related to it.” (Geörg Lukács 769)

Realism as I am using it here also refers to a certain specific form, particularly in questions of time, space, and character.<sup>43</sup> Characters in the realist novel are generally named as though they were individuals, just as the reader imagines herself an individual. In representing particular subjects rather than types or personae, they are depicted with a high degree of individuating detail: proper names, specific dates, background narratives that situate them as particular. In the development of setting, realism chooses not only specificity but also consistency and regularity. The location of the novel’s diegesis is usually specified, and events unfold in this location in an even, consistent, cartographable space, one which is tangible in its specificity and reassuring in its reproducibility. With regards to temporal structure: the realist novel develops a time structure that is attentive to minute changes in day-to-day life, producing the structure of quotidian modern time: homogenous, consistent, and empty of moral import.<sup>44</sup> In my account of realism, thus, the realism of modern fiction is distinct from but on a continuum with that of the other prose of modern reality, the newspaper, in

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<sup>43</sup> I am drawing generally here on Ian P. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel; Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley,: University of California Press, 1957).

<sup>44</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1986).

keeping with Benedict Anderson's foundational work.<sup>45</sup> In distinction from Anderson, however, I will read the newspaper alongside the romance novel, and the realism of the journalistic impulse alongside but not reducible to the realism of fictional documentation. For Georg Lukács, of course, what distinguishes realism from sheer naturalism is the operation of the symbol: the documentation of reality alone, the accumulation of credible details, does not in itself correspond to the style we recognize as a replication of our world, as realism.<sup>46</sup>

Realism as I define it is informed not only by Euro-American literary trends but also by subcontinental ones. Realism here includes the requirement that all causation be grounded in a rational, post-religious universe, which is in keeping with the ways in which "realism" is discussed in Hindi-Urdu and Bengali criticism, and perhaps in Indian-language theories more generally. The term for realism is "vastavvadi" (literally, an advocate for the real or for reality), and it is used to distinguish modern prose writing from earlier models. "Vastavvadi" or "realist" literature here is that which uses only this-worldly motivations to explain this-worldly events, as opposed to earlier fiction which frequently resorted to divine intervention, spirits, and djinns. In keeping with my sense of realism as a consolidated ideological and aesthetic position which crosses not only continents but also media, my understanding of realism here also incorporates

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<sup>45</sup> See generally Benedict R. Anderson, Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London ; New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> See generally Geörg Lukács, Realism in Our Time; Literature and the Class Struggle, World Perspectives (New York.: Harper & Row, 1971).

early cinema's preoccupation with the visible, the perceptible, and the real. Epitomized in Dadasaheb Phalke's assertion that "everything you see on the screen is real," realism in this sense is that which is realizable: not that which is true, but that which can be made to appear, via a particular set of conventions and a specific form of inscription.<sup>47</sup>

Realism, however, is not the genre of internationalist dreaming. From Esperanto to civil disobedience, from pan-Africanism to pan-Asianism, internationalist thought and fiction dabbles in melodrama, in myth, and particularly in the romance. The choice of romance in the early twentieth century is undoubtedly an ideologically loaded one. As a vehicle of anachronism and asynchronicity, it is a form famously suitable to the storytelling needs of imperialism. Yet the imperial romance's effectivity lies, at least in part, in its ability to recode the unimaginable community of empire in terms of socially sanctioned forms of desire and pleasure. These powerful operations, I would argue, are as effective for the internationalist romance as the imperial one. The genre conventions of romance, as Sara Suleri has argued, worked in the context of British-ruled India to "reorganiz[e] the materiality of colonialism into a narrative of perpetual longing and perpetual loss." (Suleri 10) Her argument is focused upon Anglo-Indian fiction as a project of colonial decoding, yet the supposed inexplicability of India may be endemic to the Anglophone romance that refers to it, even when that romance is written for anti-imperial purposes. Romance the genre, sans romance the popular preoccupation, is

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<sup>47</sup> For a contextualized discussion of Phalke's assertion and its import, see Ashish Rajadhyaksha, "India's Silent Cinema," *Light of Asia*, ed. Suresh Chabria (New Delhi: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto and National Film Archive of India, 1994).

generally association with the inscription of the colonies into metropolitan tongues, and romance, both generic and affective, seems to have a particular attachment to India. The modality of romance seems especially common in Anglophone writing around regions which can be taken to figure lost civilizations; Du Bois's writings on Ethiopia and Egypt, for instance, feminize and ahistoricize these regions into symbols of racial accomplishment longed for and lost.

The temporal disjunction embraced in the romance form, which famously assigns non-Western areas an ahistorical or primitive status, superficially resembles what Johannes Fabian famously termed "the denial of coevality," and what John Stuart Mill implied of the "waiting rooms of history." Yet my comfort with the romance's temporal disjunction stems from a suspicion that sometimes concepts travel across disciplinary boundaries without the supplementary materials that triggered their elaboration.<sup>48</sup> Synchronicity is not the only modality of effective internationalism; coevality, while desirable, is not identical to an imagined community's "meanwhile."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> I am drawing here on Dipesh Chakrabarty's reading of John Stuart Mill's essays "On Liberty" and "On Representative Government." See Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference 8. For the denial of coevalness, see Johannes Fabian, Time and the Other : How Anthropology Makes Its Object (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). For Fabian's more recent discussion of his foundational work, see Johannes Fabian, "The Other Revisited," Anthropological Theory 6.2 (2006).

<sup>49</sup> Benedict Anderson argued that modernity's shift into Walter Benjamin's conception of homogenous, empty time is accompanied by the invention of the "meanwhile," which can be contrasted with what he describes as "the medieval conception of simultaneity-along-time" The novel invents the meanwhile, by having characters moving "at the same clocked, calendrical time" but unaware of each other; finally, Anderson argues, "The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history." Anderson's other imagining organ of the nation is, of course, the newspaper. Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism," Theory of the Novel, ed. Michael McKeon 422-3.



Brent Edwards, for instance, attempts to preserve a coevalness amongst the participants of black internationalism through his commitment to reciprocity, yet he cannot but admit that such groups must necessarily access the international in different ways, even when they publish and participate in the same interwar print periodicals.<sup>50</sup> To commit to coevalness as a precondition of internationalism may be, given the radically unequal and disjunctive spaces of the world, productive of a necessary haunting in itself: a haunting not by mistakes in translation but by those cultural forms and modes that cannot but be less than contemporary with the internationalist project, accessed as that project is only by certain subjects in certain situations. Certainly the Anglophone romance “brackets” India and Indians into a timeless pre-modern zone, but in the field of self-declared romance, of fiction and the novel, it does not necessarily emphasize and produce of alterity through the assertion of a fundamentally other historical position— what Elizabeth Povinelli has termed “the tense of the other” —as it might in fields like anthropology or of government policy.<sup>51</sup> In the fictions under consideration, India may

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<sup>50</sup> Central to Edwards’ theorization is *décalage*, which he glosses as “the kernel of precisely that which cannot be transferred or exchanged,” “a changing core of difference,” and “a model for what resists or escapes translation through the African diaspora.” (14-5) For him, thus, “Reciprocity is less an originating appeal that is answered than a structure of mutual answerability: articulations of diaspora in tension and in dissonance, without necessary resolution or synthesis. ... In this sense, diaspora can be conceived only as the uneasy and unfinished *practice* of such dialogue— where each text fulfills the demand of the other’s “call” and at the same time exposes its necessary “misrecognitions,” its particular distortions of the way race travels beyond the borders of nation and language.” Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora : Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* 110.

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Povinelli, for instance, has argued that the “political cosmology” of which Fabian speaks is grounded within a broader mode of liberal governmentality, in which the relationship between the event of (ethnographic) narration and the narrated event are configured so as to produce what she calls “the tense of the other,” a bracketing, whether through the deferral or the denial of recognition, of the time of the other,

not be quite contemporaneous with England or the United States, and it may not be in a time which Westerners want to inhabit, but it is neither waiting nor bracketed, neither denied, delayed, nor abandoned. The quest temporality of romance takes the non-coeval nature of global political disjunction and vastly varying yet interconnected oppressions to resolve them into a single transfigurative present and future. The messianic moments of these fictions' final visions is the triumphant and melodramatic resolution of real political concerns into a shared and spectacular present.

This dissertation is organized along three different translational responses to the demands of cultural difference. The first response, and perhaps the most pessimistic one, is that of the commercial writer Cornelia Sorabji: to not translate at all. Even as Sorabji's fiction holds out the promise of culturally authentic information, her writing refuses to share these details. Instead, her fiction embraces the incomplete and the fragmentary, often scrambling details together in melodramatic hyperbole so as to make information retrieval impossible. Such tactics are in keeping with the writing of other women in the period, such as Sara Jeannette Duncan in Canada and England, and the writing of Rokeya Sakhawat Begum in Bengali. Whereas the internationalist romances of great modernist men seem to offer up complete if bombastic transfigured visions, the romances of international women of empire provide more qualified, and less optimistic, responses. Insofar as the genre of romance relies heavily on the figure of woman, both

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of those found unacceptable to liberal sentiments of deliberative reason. Elizabeth Povinelli, "The Tense of the Other: Recognition, Espionage, Camouflage," (2008), vol.

phobic and mythic, to mobilize its narrative energies, Sorabji's fiction reminds us of the problems which such romance imaginaries encounter when the figure of the woman in the text is paired with the figure of the woman who wrote it. Much of the material used in the Sorabji chapter has been taken from the Cornelia Sorabji collection in the India Office Records at the British Library in London. In many instances, full bibliographic information was not available; newspaper articles in particular were frequently incomplete. When possible, I have cited these manuscript sources as I cite other references, and an exhaustive list of the archival sources used is provided separately in the appendix.

My second chapter moves to the mistranslations of arguably the greatest of India's literary men: Rabindranath Tagore. Awarded the Nobel Prize in 1912 on the basis of his English version of his poetry collection Gitanjali, the continuing scandal of this English version lies in Rabindranath's rampant mistranslation of his Bengali poetry. Rabindranath's ambivalent relationship to the nationalist form of Indian anti-colonial mobilizations forms the backdrop for a literary corpus preoccupied with issues of authenticity, infidelity, and cultural miscegenation. I have, in keeping with the conventions of Bengali literary criticism, referred to the author by his first name, Rabindranath. All translations used are my own except when otherwise noted. Underlining, within an English translation, indicates words that appear in English (i.e., transcribed and not translated) in the original. In an attempt to be useful to readers of

the original and of the translation, I have provided references to the novel with chapter and not page numbers.<sup>52</sup>

My third chapter moves to the cultural mistranslations of the internationalist American W. E. B. Du Bois, who covered India in painstaking detail in his non-fiction and periodical work but scrambled subcontinental cultural and politics in his attempt to write a revolutionary romance. I discuss his 1928 Dark Princess against the context of an internationalist practice which understood a necessary infidelity to one's cultural alliances as a form of fidelity to an anti-racist world order yet to come. A shorter version of this chapter will appear in the journal *Callaloo* in summer 2010.

Each of the chapters is linked by interludes in which the writers under consideration write to and about one another. These moments of interpellation and interpretation are the lattice which supports the internationalism I describe. Gandhi, as a spectral and recurring figure in the fictions of this period, is another knot on this fragile lattice, one which inaugurates the dissertation even as it remains outside the scope of its argument. Insofar as Gandhi might be the most significant of internationalist transfigurations, particularly in an India-related project, my failure to discuss him at length constitutes a major omission. I mention him here, however, to foreground that

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<sup>52</sup> For those wishing to read Gora in English, there are at least two widely available translations. The most well known one first appeared in 1924, and, while workable, is not very good. This one is frequently and widely reprinted, and attributed to a variety of possible translators; a 2006 U.S. reprint, however, attributes the translation to W. W. Pearson. See Rabindranath Tagore, Gora, trans. W. W. Pearson (Kessinger Publishing, 2006). A later translation of Gora by Sujit Mukherjee, while less commonly known, is preferable, and it provides reasonably detailed annotation. See Rabindranath Tagore, Sujit Mukherjee and Sahitya Akademi., Gora (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1997).

this dissertation, even as it engages political questions, is not about politics as such. This is an argument about literary materials, and about the transfiguration of politics and society which occurs within them. It is thus, finally, more about the figuration of politics, than about the politics of figuration. Transfiguration, however, is predicated precisely upon the inseparable nature of those concerns. The politics of this dissertation are those of the figuration of internationalism within it, answerable not only through what is inside these pages but perhaps more so through its failures and its limits.

## 2. London, 1901: A Cramped Space of Her Own

E.M. Forster's A Passage to India begins with the question of male friendship between English and Indians, and it detours, after an alleged rape, into the making of "a general Indian." In A Passage to India, "women and children" is "that phrase that exempts the male from sanity when it has been repeated a few times," (Forster 203) and the novel ends with Aziz living with his children and writing poetry.<sup>1</sup> Poetry has appeared before in this volume, but always as the wafting airs of a lost Islamic civilization, through Aziz's reminiscences about the Mughals. (12, 113-4) Here, instead, it is a poem for a patriotic magazine, once for Hindus only, now for all Indians. As the novel and its "excellent Dr. Aziz" turn nationalist in its preoccupations, Aziz vows "to see more of Indians who were not Mohammedans, and never to look backward," for "the song of the future must transcend creed." (Forster 298)

As Aziz begins to write, however, he struggles with both form and content. He immediately generates poetry irrelevant to "these excellent Hindus," on his favorite themes, "the decay of Islam and the brevity of love," filled, as usual, with bulbuls, which his Hindu editor Mr. Das specifically asked him to avoid. He then writes a satire, "too libelous to print." (Forster 297-8) Aziz "longed to compose a new song which should be acclaimed by multitudes and even sung in the fields," yet he is stymied by the most

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<sup>1</sup> Whereas the first two sections of the novel, "Mosque" and "Caves," inhabit sterile adult spaces, the final section, "Temple," emphatically and explicitly foregrounds reproduction, starting with the extended description of a nativity play for Janmashtami (in the novel, "Gokul Ashtami"), which occupies the place of the pages of landscape description we received in the earlier two sections.

basic of choices: "In which language shall it be written? And what shall it announce?"  
(Forster 298)

Nationalism in Passage is a poem, and an illogical poem, and it never gets written. Attempting to write the poem, however, has "an effect," leading Aziz "towards the vague and bulky figure of a mother-land." (Forster 298) "The general Indian," we are told, will come into existence once Aziz has written this poem, which Mr. Das requests along with a prescription for shingles. Poem and prescription, this desired text soon generates its own proper subject: "The Indian lady as she is and not as she is supposed to be." (Forster 301)

Whereas Forster's famous India novel might be most closely associated with the genre of the imperial romance, I would argue that the "supposed" in this line is central to both nationalist and imperialist discourses of the period. Both presumed to be and ought to be, the poem of "the general Indian" engages simultaneously the realities of Indian womanhood *as well as* the presuppositions and the demands placed upon them. Well known for its invocation of rape, whether real or imagined, to resolve its late colonial narrative, Passage engages the questions of feminism more generally as well. Feminist England shows up quite early in the novel (Forster 65), with suggestions that "due to racial segregation, colonial women are protectively cloistered behind an anachronistic code of chivalry and honor." (Sharpe 121) Purdah shows up early too, in

the form of Hamidullah Begum, a foolish figure obsessed with elaborate courtesies and the necessity of marriage. (Forster 10) When we find Aziz in the final pages,

His poems were all on one topic—Oriental womanhood. “The purdah must go,” was their burden, “otherwise we shall never be free.” And he declared (fantastically) that Indian would not have been conquered if women as well as men had fought at Plassy. “But we do not show our women to the foreigner” —not explaining how this was to be managed, for he was writing a poem. ... Illogical poems—like their writer. Yet they struck a true note: there cannot be a mother-land without new homes. (Forster 329)

In Forster’s novel, as in much late colonial discourse, purdah seems to offer both the cause of Indian colonization and the solution to it. Yet the removal of purdah does not, even in this fictional vision, end gender segregation: “new homes” are needed for a new nation, but these will still be patriarchal homes. If the “we” who will be freed by the elimination of purdah might be imagined, in the first quote from Aziz in this passage, as a gender-inclusive plurality of (Indian) men and women, that same “we” becomes, in the very next quotation, emphatically that of a collective of men as a nation, and a homosocial male-only imaginary of international exchange. Forster’s woman-blaming novel of empire culminates smoothly and plausibly in a commitment against purdah, a trajectory should caution us from presuming that purdah could form the substance of a feminist politics.<sup>2</sup> “New homes” may be needed for a new nation, but these will still be patriarchal ones.

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<sup>2</sup> Similar to Sara Suleri’s caution regarding rape as the basis for a feminist politics; as she points out, “The geography of rape as a dominant trope for the act of imperialism... serves as a subterfuge to avoid the striking symbolic homoeroticism of Anglo-Indian narrative.” (17) The trope of purdah, of course, operates



I want to suggest that it is purdah, and not nationalism, which poses the impossible impasse for Aziz's literary-political aspirations. In the late imperial moment, purdah becomes a key site of nationalist contention, and it also becomes, in the hands of some women, the trope par excellence for the failings of both nationalist and imperialist visions. The purdahnashin, defined by Cornelia Sorabji in a 1908 glossary as "she who sits behind the curtain: the secluded," mainly includes upper-caste Hindu women from wealthy households. (Sorabji Between the Twilights: Being Studies of Indian Women by One of Themselves xiii) Their seclusion, consequently, should *not* be completely conflated with seclusion as an Islamic religious practice. The purdahnashin, moreover, should not be collapsed with the emphasis on the veil as a garment and an instrument, whether for patriarchal oppression or for the obstruction of imperial vision. Women in purdah did not appear on the street in veiled garments; as appropriate to their class status, they travelled instead in carefully screened carriages and palkis. While Forster does approach India and hence purdah quite literally through Egypt and Islamic practices, it bears emphasis here that, after all, the curtain is not a veil. Inderpal Grewal has argued for a continuity in ways of thinking about women's imprisonment, arguing that terms like harem, zenana, purdah, and antahpur collapse into a generalized discourse around female incarceration. As she puts it, "in colonial discursive practices, all of these lose their specificities to mark a colonial 'phantasm' ... of the incarcerated

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differently than that of rape, but it, too, is frequently a subterfuge for anxieties around male authority and sovereignty. Sara Suleri, The Rhetoric of English India (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 17.

'Eastern' woman, lacking freedom and embodying submission and sexuality as well as an inaccessibility that colonial power hopes to penetrate." (Grewal 5) Fantasies of women's imprisonment, as much as fantasies of women's liberation, continue to inform internationalism in general and international feminism in particular, and to foundationally structure the ways in which the internationalist novel invokes and transfigures, constructs and narrates colonial and metropolitan space alike.

Sorabji's 1908 collection, Between the Twilights, being studies of Indian women by one of themselves, is dedicated "to the Hour of Union," a utopian temporal reference with both mystical and political implications. The title of the collection highlights a temporal liminality that is expounded at length in the Preface. Sorabji begins by saying that "In the language of the Zenana there are two twilights, 'when the Sun drops into the sea,' and 'when he splashes up stars for spray,' . . . the *Union*, that is, of *Earth and Sun*, and, again, of *Light and Darkness*." (vi) It is between these "two twilights," this indeterminate and fleeting moment heretofore unknown and unnoticed by her British and American reading public<sup>3</sup> that she locates not only the subjects of her book but also her own, as the author of this volume:

And the space between is the time of times in these sun-wearied plains in which I dwell. One sees the world in a gentle haze of reminiscence.... Is not all Life marching towards the Silence? it seems to say.

Yes, the manner of its loitering is varied, but always, always, is it an hour of enchantment, this hour Between the Twilights: and it is my

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<sup>3</sup> Between the Twilights was published in New York and London.

very own. I choose it, from out the day's full sheaf, and I sit with it in the Silences on my roof-tree.

It was in this hour, through a hot summer, that the thoughts which make this little book came to me, and were written down. (vii-viii)

Her desire to write this book comes from her days spent "going in and out among my friends of the Zenana, and a great yearning was in my heart that others should know them as I did, in their simplicity and their wisdom." (viii) She positions herself firmly between those who would know and those that they would make known, establishing herself as the only one who goes "in and out" —and not us. The women of which she speaks, whose stories and lives she reports, are frequently referred to as her friends of "The Inside", and they inhabit what she repeatedly calls a land of "silences." The violation of intimacy, the question of privacy (with or without interiority), is foregrounded from the start:

The half is not yet told: much would not bear telling—I had no business to take strangers into the walled garden of our intimacy—and some things were too elusive for speech, but the sounds which have thriddled [sic] the Silence have been echoes of reality, and I can only hope that they may convey some impression of the gently pulsing life of the Zenana. (viii)

Whereas the echoes of Forster's Marabar caves were significant precisely because they were phantasmatic, the echoes of Sorabji's zenanas are the vibrations of another way of life. The Zenana retains mystery and romance in Sorabji's writing, but it is also an echo

of a wider world.<sup>4</sup> It operates as the most authentic repository of the Indian subject, the most interior of interiors. Questions of access and knowledge, of modernity and archaism, around the Indian zenana become contentious for both imperial and anti-imperial positions in the early twentieth century. Indian nationalism, after all, staked its originality in the realm of culture, and on the Indian woman as its icon.<sup>5</sup>

The Indian interior, and the zenana as its exemplar, is Sorabji's literary specialization because it is also her route to commercial success. She is one of the very few writers who have access to these spaces, which even Flora Annie Steel and Rudyard Kipling cannot narrate. Sorabji begins a 1903 essay on these two authors with praise for Steel's short fiction, she soon detours, with an awkward "But, *but*—" to criticizing their abilities to portray those things which they have not seen.

Brick and mortar, Indian servants, the life of the bazaar, of the field, of the road—things they have seen, and known, and can see—are written down inimitably—written so that all the world sees them leaping into being from the printed pages. But the life behind closed doors..., the complexities of the innermost soul of the reserved East—this neither of them really touches. (207)

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<sup>4</sup> In its association with the feminine, the traditional, and the somewhat archaic, the zenana also serves as a useful background for tragedy. In the account of one woman's death, Sorabji explains that the zenana is the place where "regret and longing were prettiest rendered," particularly "In the hour of Union (as we call the Twilight in Bengal), when the glories of the West had died into silence, and earth and sky were gray and still as life at the passing of a friend..." ("Devi—Goddess!" 35)

<sup>5</sup> See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1986), Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

While Kipling and Steel are excellent with “the servant class of Indians, a class with which of necessity they are best acquainted,” they fail to provide the “real India” and the “reserved India” which Sorabji’s fiction can offer.<sup>6</sup> (217-8)

But of the real India, the reserved India, the India behind closed doors, the mystic, subtle-minded, courteous, dignified, perhaps disdainful India—the India to whom a thousand years is as but a day—of this they know little or nothing, though both occasionally get a glimpse, an inspiration. They try to describe the garments and houses and habits of this kind of Indian, and they go hopelessly wrong; they try to follow the workings of the Indian mind, and they are guilty of gross (if unconscious) misrepresentation.<sup>7</sup> (218)

Despite this assertion of intimate knowledge, and even the advertisement thereof, Sorabji’s fiction both lays out the promise of authentic representation and then refuses to yield up crucial details and complete accounts. Even as Sorabji lays claim to the “real India, the reserved India, the India behind closed doors,” she disclaims exhaustive treatment of India as such. Sorabji may have operated in her legal career as

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<sup>6</sup> Sorabji says that Kipling is a better writer than Steel (hers is too clichéd) and that Kipling is extraordinary with roads and bazaars, as is Steel with Punjabi peasants. Overall, however, Sorabji is markedly harsher on Kipling:

On the subject of Rudyard Kipling it behoves one to show one’s feelings and hide one’s opinions. The England of the present age is a forcing-house for Imperialism; a forgotten playground for domestic philanthropy; a paradise for cheap journalism. And Rudyard Kipling, who makes the nation’s pet songs of Imperialism, who domesticates the West in the East, and knocks at the door of the home country but to sympathise with—war taxation, is the Great Jove of this paradise. The voice of the people has adjudged him his divinity; and who dare dispute it? Or, if one dare, as we are told to do, here and now, who would believe? (211)

<sup>7</sup> Her examples here are as piercing as they are funny. For instance: “Mrs. Steel’s ladies are always letting their ‘white veils fall in billowy curves, like a cloud, about their feet.’ Perhaps she does not realize that this would leave some of them in the nude.” (218) Kipling, among many other mistakes, forgets that “Indian silks do not *rustle*. It is one proof of the fact that they have no admixture of cotton in their manufacture. The ‘rustle’ is the property of the shoddy silk markets of the West, and is – Kipling forgets—the peculiar perquisite of the fiction of West-End drawing rooms.” (219)

the single, exemplary expert on the issues of Indian women, as the only Indian woman of her time to hold a law degree,<sup>8</sup> yet in her writings the knowledge which she carries from her experiences, both personal and professional, do not translate into a complete portrait of all of the subcontinent's women. This is not only because of the privacy considerations demanded by the Zenana's intimacies, which she has shared not simply as an outside visitor (much like many British missionaries of the period) but as a native woman, as interior not only in her location but also in her participation in their confidences. The incompleteness is also because she has excluded from these Studies "the Anglicized and English-educated Indian, the capable woman who earns her own living, the cultured woman of the world or philanthropist." (ix) This is because "a common language and the opportunity of intercourse" has made her available for investigation by "any sojourner in India at first-hand." (ix) In this curious authorial move, Sorabji absents herself—Anglicized and English-educated, capable and self-supporting, the cultured woman of the world—from her own narrative: the author disappears behind a veil of her own choosing, a veil of disavowal. In Sorabji's fictional universe, the modern colonial woman is unremarkable and familiar, and the traditional native woman deserves special attention.

But these others of whom I have written seemed to justify in a very special sense the hour of my meditation. . . . They float elusive in the half-light between two civilizations, sad by reason of something lost, sad

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<sup>8</sup> For a thorough account of her legal career see Suparna Gooptu, Cornelia Sorabji : India's Pioneer Woman Lawyer (New Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

by reason of the more that may come to be rejected here-after. . . . And none but God knoweth when will toll for them that final Hour of Union, and whether, when it is here, we shall be able to see the stars through the blue veil of the Light that lies slain for all Eternity. (Sorabji Between the Twilights: Being Studies of Indian Women by One of Themselves ix)

The Oxford-educated, cosmopolitan, Christian Sorabji here claims the hour “between the twilights” for her very own.<sup>9</sup> She shares it, moreover, with those “who sit behind the curtain,” the purdahnashin: uneducated and parochial, literally immobile in an age that valorizes mobility. Whereas Sorabji’s half-light is that between the New Woman and the woman she is replacing, the half-light of her charges in the zenana is a spatial situation, “between two civilizations.” (ix) In keeping, perhaps, with her consistent self-assertion, throughout her career, as a British subject, ideally marked by neither race nor gender, Sorabji here erases the ways in which her own subject position—that of the modern Indian woman—is itself the site of a catachresis.<sup>10</sup>

Sorabji worked through the Court of Wards, which took widows and children under its care. In this structure, “the law or the colonial/imperial state... acquires the role of ‘surrogate husband,’ emphasizing its preeminence through a language of

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<sup>9</sup> An overview of Sorabji’s literary career and persona can be found in Ranjana Sidhanta Ash, “Two Early-Twentieth-Century Women Writers,” A History of Indian Literature in English, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). For a longer version focused on her legal career, see Gooptu, Cornelia Sorabji : India's Pioneer Woman Lawyer. Given the biographical interest in Sorabji, her autobiography has received quite a bit of critical attention: Cornelia Sorabji, India Calling; the Memories of Cornelia Sorabji (London: Nisbet & co. Ltd., 1935). She also wrote a biography of her sister: Cornelia Sorabji, Susie Sorabji, Christian-Parsee Educationist of Western India; a Memoir (London: Oxford university press, H. Milford, 1932).

<sup>10</sup> Gayatri Spivak famously asserted that the prevalence of catachresis in the colonial context marks postcoloniality itself as a deconstructive case. See for instance Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Marginality in the Teaching Machine,” Outside in the Teaching Machine (1993).

protection and control, the basic premise of the Court of Wards Act.” (Banerjee 306) Consequently, even though Sorabji “repeatedly draws attention to [the purdahnashin] as rights-bearing subjects” and tries to introduce them as “members of a civic collective in terms of their public service” (Banerjee 306-7), she also infantilizes them and speaks, in every sense, *for* them, “the ‘little ladies’ in her care.” (Burton 72) Caught between the modernizing impulses of imperial jurisprudence and the racist impulses of imperial reason, the purdahnashin operate within a structure that recognizes their rights only by proxy, inscribing them as dependents, and not subjects, in their access to the liberal state. The purdahnashin are exemplary, thus, of not the denial but the *deferral* of recognition, in which the living between a past perfect — of utter premodernity and lack of protection, in which the purdahnashin were completely ignored by the state — and the future perfective — in which the dilemmas posed by the primitive practice of purdah will have been ameliorated by the elimination of the practice (and of the purdahnashin) themselves.

This reading of the deferred modernity of Sorabji’s chosen spaces, moreover, would explain her refusal to engage in a politics that would lead to the elaboration proper of rights-bearing subjects of empire: her refusal, that is, to emphatically bring the inhabitants of the zenana, the purdahnashin, into the promised land of a presumably shared or at least desired modernity. Sorabji’s insistence on the purdahnashin “as survivors of history” does not automatically lead to the conclusion that “Sorabji turned



the zenana into a museum, staked her claim as its authoritative tour guide, and transformed it from an archive into a souvenir for consumption by a variety of imperial and colonial publics." (Burton 69) Such analysis may in fact reinforce the process by which inadequately modernized or unrepentantly different persons like the *purdahnashin* are bracketed and then un-bracketed as liberal modernity marches on.<sup>11</sup> To now, belatedly, retrospectively recognize Sorabji's "little ladies" as subjects, as her contemporaries of the twentieth century and not some lost primitive civilization, might promise symbolic restitution even as it effectively erases historical costs. Sorabji's *purdahnashin* are, discursively and politically, wedged "between the twilights" of a declining imperialism and an ascendant nationalism. We can revisit her strategies, but we cannot, and should not, rehabilitate the "little ladies" of her care. Sorabji's refusal to figure the *purdahnashin* as modern for her "variety of imperial and colonial publics" might signal the ways in which liminal and transitional subjects maneuvered within the interstices of Britain's liberal empire.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, her fiction articulates "the difficult task of rewriting its own conditions of impossibility as the conditions of its possibility." (Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 285)

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<sup>11</sup> In the historical experience of "the juridical history of constitutional democracies," we find that "when the projected future became the actual present this chiasmus opened into a decisively negative judgment of the bracket itself. And yet the conservation of the narrative configuration of tense in the new judgment isolates that judgment from reflexive memory...." Povinelli, "The Tense of the Other: Recognition, Espionage, Camouflage," vol., 15.

<sup>12</sup> Povinelli turns to the terms "camouflage" and "espionage" to describe these strategies of bracketed existence; as she puts it: "No one lives in a projective future. To live the present as if it were this future demands that a social world learn how to maneuver illegally. They must hide out within this environment appearing to be in a time they are not ... because the time they are in is a time no one wants to recognize." Povinelli, "The Tense of the Other: Recognition, Espionage, Camouflage," vol., 18.

Contemporary criticism on Cornelia Sorabji focuses primarily on her autobiography and her role as a historical figure, touching on her fiction usually only to condemn its Orientalist tropology.<sup>13</sup> Sorabji was, however, an emphatically commercial writer, relying upon her fiction to support her legal career. Her corpus must be read, consequently, not only in relation to the discursive constraints which her stories navigate but also the commercial imperatives to which they are subject. Consequently, my discussion of her work will attend not only to the stories themselves, but also to the manner in which they were framed in the moment of publication.

Between the Twilights was published in 1908 in London and New York, with an exquisitely self-reflexive preface by Sorabji herself. Her 1901 collection, Love and Life Behind the Purdah, in contrast, comes with an abundance of prefatory material written by others. In its 2003 reissue by Oxford University Press, the original prefatory material has been retained, with the addition of yet another introduction, a glossary of terms, and a fairly extended bibliography. It is as though Sorabji can only be read through a fog of interpretive matter: even to close read her fiction is to read it as it has been multiply read, and through the variety of people for whom and by whom this writing becomes possible. Already a household name in England in 1901, the prefatory material to the original edition provides not so much introduction but attestation.<sup>14</sup> These notes from

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<sup>13</sup> See for example Antoinette M. Burton, Dwelling in the Archive : Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> More than one contemporary reviewer remarked on the seemingly unnecessary nature of the 1901 prefaces. *The Guardian*, for instance, begins by remarking that Sorabji's "labours on behalf of her

the Marchioness of Dufferin and from Lord Hobhouse can be read as the supporting documents for this fictional corpus, much as the Dufferin Fund and Lord Hobhouse's connections were material supports for Sorabji's education and professional establishment, respectively.<sup>15</sup>

The Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava assures that these stories "exhibit to us from the inside, as it were, customs and ways of living and of thinking which we usually contemplate from the outside only." (7) The Marchioness then suggests a particular utility for the metropolitan reader in the persistence of purdah:

Perhaps in these days of stress and strain, of activity and competition, a peculiar interest may be found in contemplating lives spent in the strict privacy of the purdah, under the iron discipline of custom, and in observing, with reverence and admiration, the way in which the virtues of patience, charity, self-forgetfulness, and devotion to duty, flourish in this silent and secluded world. (7-8)

If the East was invariably the repository of a refreshing and restorative premodernity, then the spaces of the zenana are even more profoundly so: the zenana, with its tragically innocent women, is separated here from the "iron discipline of custom," becoming instead a "silent and secluded world" in which virtues flourish. Such imagery of course is suggested in the naturalistic tendencies of Sorabji's depiction:

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countrywomen are so well known" that the prefaces by others are not necessary. See review of 1 Jan 1903, MSS Eur f165/197, IOR.

<sup>15</sup> For details on this, see Gooptu, Cornelia Sorabji : India's Pioneer Woman Lawyer.

the zenana is some Edenic garden, in which the flowers of upper-class Hindu women can peacefully bloom.<sup>16</sup>

The letter from Lord Hobhouse to the Author, written in London in October 1901, begins by conceding that while it is “obvious to any observer” that the seclusion of women presents a “bar” to social intercourse, and while this “profoundly ... weaken[s] the political structure of a country.” Yet Hobhouse says that seclusion, here less a practice than a set of “ideas of what is due to the dignity of women,” is “woven” into “the very fabric of Indian society” through “long custom.”<sup>17</sup> (10) Along with caste, village communities, and ancestor-worship, traditions like purdah are to India what modern science is to Western Europe:

The traditions of the multitudinous social aggregates in India, all strengthened and endeared to them by a halo of religion, are — or so at least it seems to one who is not of them — to each the world in which they live and move and have their being, socially keeping each in their places,

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<sup>16</sup> Acknowledging that, in these stories, “heroic actions are often performed from mistaken motives and superstitious fears,” the Marchioness ends her preface with a prayer for these (real and/or fictional) Indian women. She hopes and prays that, “like as suttee has disappeared before the march of Christianity and of civilization, so other trials peculiar to the lives of Indian women may gradually soften and pass away.” (8) Suttee for Sorabji, however, is not quite a “trial” for Indian women; instead, it is an expression of authentic agency and longing, manifest through a dramatic and now incomprehensible action.

<sup>17</sup> This is, in essence, an argument about the limitations of the nation, here leveraged towards continuing imperial interests:

It may be, probably is, the case that they [traditions like seclusion] prevent the gradual fusion of tribes, castes, communities, families, or other limited divisions of mankind, into the higher order of a nation; but among the individuals of these limited divisions they form a social cement of the strongest conservative force. Not only do they preserve peace and order, but... they meet some social needs in easier fashion than is found possible in the more vigorous national life of Western Europe.

Hobhouse’s examples of these better-met needs are “the settlement of petty disputes” and “the support of the indigent.” If these social sanctions were taken away “suddenly, or even rapidly, the result would be chaos, some frightful disruptions and convulsions.” (10)

just as the insensible force of gravitation and the insensible pressure of the atmosphere do physically for all of us. (10-11)

While accepting the insensible, natural, and inexorable quality of these social rituals, one should work to ameliorate their “inconvenient consequences,” the chief among these being the purdahnashins’ difficulties dealing with property. (11-12)

Hobhouse ends the letter by outlining the need for ladies “versed in legal affairs” who would work with the pardah-nashin, and with a seal of approval for Sorabji, whom he addresses directly:

You, at any rate, are doing what you can to promote it—partly by holding up phases of Indian society to view, mainly by offering in your own person an instance of a lady competent to act as a “man of business” if only she can obtain the requisite position and the requisite recognition of her usefulness. And so may you prosper. (13)

Sorabji’s utility here is primarily in being exemplary, and secondarily in being literary: she is a lady who can “partly” display “phases of Indian society,” and “mainly” a lady who can “act as a ‘man of business’.” The aspiration to become a “man of business” is found repeatedly in Sorabji’s own correspondence and advocacy: in 1903, negotiating with the colonial bureaucracy for a permanent position, she argues: “Is it not possible to give the widowed purdahnashins access to a “man of business” of her own sex, with whom she can speak face to face?”<sup>18</sup> Sorabji’s use of “of her own sex” here instead of “lady” or “woman” is not incidental; as she struggled to institutionalize and

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<sup>18</sup> Sorabji, Cornelia. “Draft scheme of Legal Relief For Widowed purdahnashins In India With Notes On The Need For Such Relief.” MSS Eur f165/124, IOR. Quoted in Gooptu, Cornelia Sorabji : India's Pioneer Woman Lawyer 83.

professionalize herself, the appellation “lady,” and to a lesser extent “woman,” was one which she sought quite literally to erase.<sup>19</sup>

Sorabji as “lady” and as “man of business” might be understood as not a gender contradiction, drawing as it does upon paradigms of professionalization for its particular import, but rather as a binding together of two different dimensions of what she was expected to do. Sorabji, as described by the Marchioness in the introductory note, is an Indian woman of “strength of character and talent,” with “deep sympathy and affection” for her countrywomen, whose “tender, faithful, meek, and lowly character” is set before us in these pages. (7) Her subjectivity as “a lady” operates in conjunction with her signification as a “man of business”: the interior and the exterior join together, tightly bound together as to constitute a single item, the “horror story” that is the face. (Deleuze and Guattari “Year Zero: Faciality” 168) Her face, that of a (native) lady acting as a man of business, is that of a zone which delimits appropriate and ascribed forms of both signification and subjectivity. The phrase “man of business” inscribes and ascribes a particular idiom of professionalism and modernity, which “native lady” fills with passion and mystery.<sup>20</sup> Sorabji provides a face, not only in the

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<sup>19</sup> Sorabji was appointed on May 15, 1904 as “the first lady legal adviser to the court of wards.” She, however, wanted her post to be called not “lady legal adviser to the court of wards” but “Legal Adviser for *purdahnashins* and Zenana Officer to the Court of Wards.” As Suparna Gooptu explains, “She wanted to underscore the legal nature of her work and her qualifications, and asked that Lady be deleted as it was not a ‘professional prefix.’” These discussions are found in a series of correspondence to Elena Rathbone, in particular her note of 21 June 1911, all found in Mss Eur f165/124, IOR. For a narrative account see Gooptu, Cornelia Sorabji : India's Pioneer Woman Lawyer 117-9.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze and Guattari argue that “Significance is never without a white wall upon which it inscribes its signs and redundancies. Subjectification is never without a black hole in which it lodges its consciousness,

simple order of representativeness and representation, but also in this Deleuzean fashion.

Sorabji's story "Love and Life" commences with a tawdry poem about love imprisoned, in a zenana "bounded by high walls bristling with the spiky anger of the gaoler against all intruders. Not that walls of any kind were necessary; for those within would have died rather than creep outside their shelter...." (40) The youngest wife, Piari, was sent away by her mother and became the child bride of "he whom we may not name" and the young ward of the zenana. (41) She is looked after by the older wife, Sandal, but the relationship is not a maternal one. Piari's experience, we are told, is not "the mother-hunger," but a craving for a different kind of kinship between women, one conceivable only because of purdah. Piari is a voracious reader, particularly delighted when her husband tells her that soon she shall "be quite as clever as the memsahibs... and who talk to him as if—as if their brains were men's brains!" (43)

Trouble erupts in the household, however, when their husband takes a modern bride, an eighteen year old who has been "brought up somewhat on Western principles," with an English governess, and "has kept but casual purdah." (46) She "knew not apparently the etiquette of this zenana... She expected the king to greet her as

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passion, and redundancies. ... Faces are not basically individual; they define zones of frequency or probability, delimit a field that neutralizes in advance any expressions or connections unamenable to the appropriate significations. ... Concrete faces cannot be assumed to come ready-made. They are engendered by an *abstract machine of faciality* (*visag  t  *), which produces them at the same time as it gives the signifier its white wall and subjectivity its black hole." Gilles Deleuze and F  lix Guattari, "Year Zero: Faciality," *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 167-8.

the English Resident greeted his wife!" (48) Sorabji, demurely withholds from us the etiquette that we, her English readers, will not know. We are told what the foreign element, the educated Kunti, expected—a behavior we can imagine rather easily—but we are not told what etiquette our protagonists, or what they would expect. Sorabji's exoticizing retention here enables her to withhold the information she was paid and deputed to collect.<sup>21</sup> In allying herself with the familiar and the obvious—a woman raised "on western principles," like her readers—she disavows precisely that which constitutes the commercial appeal of her writing: a promise of native information which is proffered but not fulfilled.

The foreignness of this woman ruins the amiable beauty of this zenana: "The new lady had ways and occupations in which the other two could hardly sympathize; and the king... unconsciously got to talking English to her—discussing men and books, and the places she had seen; for she too had travelled." (47-8) Piari, who is now pregnant, goes insane and disappears, to be only found by Sandal: in the garden "the child—and beside her, another." (48) The newborn child survives, but the child-mother Piari is dead. Sorabji reworks here the horror of child-mothers, famously leveraged in

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<sup>21</sup> "Although Sorabji was deeply invested in her role as a legal practitioner, in her first capacity as official advisor to the Court of Wards she was first and foremost an ethnographer for the colonial state. And while she received much attention during her lifetime as a pioneering woman lawyer, she ought rightly to be remembered as the first Indian woman to be salaried as a native informant for the Government of India." Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive : Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India*.<sup>70</sup>



Katherine Mayo's polemical Mother India (1927), but to different ends.<sup>22</sup> Whereas the child-brides and child-mothers of Mayo's diatribe are dying in childbirth from the barbarities of Indian tradition, understood as a kind of phallogocentric primitivism, the child-mother of Sorabji's story dies because of the contamination of the traditional Hindu household by a foreign-educated woman. Sorabji's life may be available to us as a triumphal narrative of hybridity, but in her fiction the uneasy polygamy of Hindu tradition and European modernity can only lead to disaster.

In many cases, contact is contact alone: not hybridity, not mixing, not even an uneasy marriage. The colonial state might be the paradigmatic example of this contact without combination, and Sorabji's fiction narrates this failure particularly in realms of public health and legal administration. First published as "An Indian Plague Story" in September 1899, "The Pestilence at Noonday" fictionalizes the Indian plague epidemics of the 1890s, which had dramatic consequences for both the imperial public health administration and the incipient project of Indian nationalism.<sup>23</sup> If, as Priscilla Wald has argued, the prose of plague and the conventions of contagion demonstrate

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<sup>22</sup> American journalist Katherine Mayo famously argued that India was not ready and not deserving of independence precisely because of the oppression of women, emphasizing early marriage and child-bearing in her catalog of horrors. Mayo quoted several Indian woman leaders in her diatribe. In the ensuing controversy (Gandhi famously called it a "gutter-inspector's report"), Sorabji was perhaps the only Indian *not* to disavow the statements attributed to her in the book. Katherine Mayo, Mother India (New York: Harcourt, 1927). For an extended discussion of the book's reception and impact, see Mrinalini Sinha, Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Most famously, perhaps, in the assassination of the chairman of the plague committee in Pune in 1897. See David Arnold, Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), Gyan Prakash, Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

understandings of community and the anxieties around them, the difficulties and ruptures in this story demonstrate precisely the manner in which the Indian plague epidemics of the turn of the century colonial context attempted to delineate a population only to reveal its impossible heterogeneity.<sup>24</sup> This is what Sara Suleri, more generally, has termed colonialism's "unimaginable community,"<sup>25</sup> and what Frantz Fanon described as colonialism's divided geography.<sup>26</sup> The Sorabji story is useful because it articulates the problem of population and the problem of space precisely within the unimaginability of the colonial context.

Sorabji's narrativization delineates not a single clearly delimited population but one that fractures under the weight of the plague narrative. Sorabji's "Pestilence at Noonday" is narrated through seven different sections, though the story is only twenty-six pages long. The Hindu couple in the zenana; the native populace in the street; the interiors of temples and religious meetings; the sahibs of Anglo-India; the plague-afflicted city; the cremation ground: this is a type of narrative portraiture which does not even attempt to link its various spaces and persons. The story commences with the assertion of authority by Sita's dismissive and impatient husband,<sup>27</sup> who departs for the

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<sup>24</sup> Priscilla Wald has argued that contagion displays "the rationale of social organization," enabling the explanation of "both the potential destruction of the community and the consequences of its survival." (14, 23) The narrativization of the epidemic is a crucial component of this process, for it operates as one of "the epistemological technologies that delineate the membership and scale of a population." (19) Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*.

<sup>26</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

<sup>27</sup> The story begins with an unframed cry: "But you will forget me, my lord!" (14) This turns out to be the cry of Sita, our educated yet traditionally married protagonist, and her husband responds, "I am sorry that I let

'real' sovereign nation, England, and then shifts to the dubious sovereignty of the god, perhaps merely an idol, in the Ramachandra temple. The narrative then moves to the authority accorded, mistakenly, to a planter who refuses to repay his debts to Sita's father, and then that given, foolishly and again mistakenly, to the loud nationalist Gopal. Finally, after those crucial moments of incursion by the state public health authorities upon the domestic spaces of their colonized subjects, we are witness to Sita's tenuous authority over the space(s) of her own house, which again proves to be illusory. The story ends, appropriately enough, on the wayside, in public space: the only real authority or sovereignty in this fictional India is that of the British colonial state.

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them educate you. ... Remember you are still a Hindu wife, however glibly your tongue may adapt itself to foreign languages." (14) Sita's education here, her modernity, is singled out as an adaptation of the tongue: one which, as this superficial glibness demonstrates, does not go beyond the superficial, the deterritorialization and reterritorialisation of the mouth, not of the "Hindu wife" attached to it. Although this passage has been singled out for its implausibility, particularly because of the formal abstraction of its phrasing in the context of a marital (and thus ostensibly intimate) relationship, this passage highlights Sorabji's understanding of both modernity and traditionality as a matter of linguistic adaptation: a reshaping of the mouth, but not necessarily a reshaping of the subject which speaks.

One 1902 reviewer, who observes a formulaic pathos about the collection, singles out this passage for its implausibility: "There is a somewhat diluted flavor of Maeterlinekian pathos about these melancholy little stories, which nearly all end in the death of the leading characters by plague, poison, broken heart, or otherwise. Some of the ill-fated heroines (by no means all of them *purdah-nashins*) are young Indian women who have received some smattering of education, just enough to put them out of harmony with their environment, and to render them objects of dislike and distrust to their untaught associates. These all die under depressing circumstances, generally in the arms of a single faithful servant." While admitting his own unfamiliarity with the material, this presumably English reviewer feels equipped to comment on the presumably universal(isable) relations between men and women in marriage: it is unlikely that any husband, in any language, every spoke to his wife in such terms. "We have perhaps said enough to indicate that the atmosphere of Miss Sorabji's stories is very unlike that of actual life in India as known to Europeans. This, she would probably retort, is due to our want of acquaintance with the modes of thought and action of Indian women of the upper classes, and as we must needs admit the ignorance thus imputed, it is not easy to carry the argument any further. Still we find it hard to believe...." ("Love and Life Behind the Purdah" 2 Jan 1902)

The story begins with her husband's departure and then resumes with a scene nine years later, again in "the short Indian twilight," where she shows us a street with "a whole spectrum of exquisite color": she notes that, "to the seeing eye, the little procession was inarticulate history."<sup>28</sup> (16) Hybridity however is either comical, as in the tailor who wears a Vishnu mark on his forehead and carries his new red shoes "carefully under a protecting left arm," or villainous, as in the "hybrid production" of Master Gopal, who "'creaks aloud in cheap patent leather shoes and dubious white socks—ineffectual covering for a gratuitous display of muscleless leg, surmounted by folds of loose white drapery and a rusty black coat.'" (16-17) This creature, who writes editorials against the colonial government, is talking about the "dreaded disease," most likely the Black Death or bubonic plague, approaching the city while ogling the "slender, gracefully clad" Sita, who is rushing to the temple.<sup>29</sup>

By the fourth section of the story, the "dreadful plague had already begun its ravages" in the town, and men stood, "at the meeting of the ways and on the steps of the

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<sup>28</sup> Even Hindu idolatry, along with the "primitive tastes for the attractive in dress," can be read as compatible with modernity, linked to a modern work ethic as the clothes are linked to a sense of history: "The little silver bell tinkles at a wayside shrine, calling the laboring man to propitiate the idol for the carelessness and detected dishonesties of his day's labours; and goodly Hindus, men and women, stream down the busy thoroughfare, responsive to the call." (16)

<sup>29</sup> Gopal says he will marry her, who "will be worth the price": "She will be a great help to me over at my new paper. 'Tis well to educate girls sometimes; it makes them marketable." (17) Asked by her father, Shastri, to marry him for her son's sake, Sita demurs through an idiom of convenient traditionalism: "For my husband's sake," for she "like[s] not this new notion of remarriage." (20, emphasis in the original) Sita then suggests another solution to their poverty, that she "make use of [her] learning." "Of what avail is all that you have let me learn, all the Sanskrit and English and other things, and I am less able to help myself than the woman who grinds the corn for our daily bread?" (20) Her father, however, refuses.

temples," discussing the "stringent measures" of the "wise government."<sup>30</sup> While "some greyheads" had been "urging prayer as the best means of averting the disease," they did so "cautiously." The nationalist Gopal, however, delivers a nativist polemic, which begins with the assertion that "Our temples are our hospitals" and then works through a paranoid invocation of whiteness and death. The carriages for the sick, Gopal says, are hearses; the "white tents" to house the sick are treacherous as well: "That white canvas is monument to a living grave...."; and, in contrast to the days in which "the sepoy were in command," now "even white rupees will not buy your ransom." (25-6) He exhorts them to disobey the colonial government, invoking kinship categories to cast quarantine as not a source of protection but a contaminating intrusion into the familial.<sup>31</sup>

Through the operations of contagion and contamination, a plague both threatens the social order and reveals its levels of interconnection. In the Euro-American twentieth century, plague is imagined as coming from outside, from dangerously foreign ethnic groups that have somehow infiltrated the national body. Consequently, the hermetic

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<sup>30</sup> This is also, of course, Sorabji's comment on the Indian nationalist mobilizations of her time: "The inflammable young Indian had called monster meetings, and was airing his budding eloquence. There were Mohammedan meetings, and Hindu meetings, and meetings of both combined. In the great public library, in the heart of the city, had met the densest of these miscellaneous crowds." (25)

<sup>31</sup> Gopal appeals to mothers, husbands, wives, and finally "all ye fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, sisters, brothers—ye who guard the religion of the nation." He then performs a rhetorical dialogue of future abandonment and betrayal:

"You mothers! how will you feel when your dying children are snatched from your arms?"

"You husbands! where is your manhood, that you can allow other men to hold the hand of your faithful wives?"

"You wives! how will you abandon your husbands' corpses to contamination?"

(25)

sealing of quarantine mimics that desired for a hermetically sealed nation-state: “the state imagines the disease as a foreign threat and... uses the disease to imagine the nation as a discrete ecosystem with its own biological as well as social connections.” (Wald 23) Quarantine in Sorabji’s story, however, cannot operate through the purity of the national body: the native inhabitants are the locus of contagion, and it is medicine and assistance that comes from outside. In the precisely unimaginable community that marks the colonial context, quarantine cannot be valorized towards a larger national purpose. If quarantine tends to be particularly sensitive to racial distinctions, apposite enough to its origins in the early twentieth century, then in the colonial context this is exacerbated by a situation in which the origins of the affliction, and the mythic persons of the afflicted, are not envied and feared minorities but a faceless brown majority, its inhabitants both overwhelming and indistinguishable. Sorabji’s “Indian Plague Story” demonstrates not the difficulties of keeping the races apart, but the difficulties of separating out, *within* a single race, “the *evil* (in health) from the *good*.”<sup>32</sup> (27)

In the fifth section, Sita observes the health inspectors and carefully notes their treatment of others’ homes. Most natives attempt to avoid the hospital through an

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<sup>32</sup> This phrasing is taken from one of the characters, an old Qazi, who attempts to convince his compatriots to cooperate: “You are ignorant, my children. You do not know that if the authorities separate the sick from the well, the *evil* (in health) from the *good*, ‘tis to give both a chance of life. Those white tents are no monument to the expectant dead; they are indeed monuments, but to the care for us, of our rulers!” Cornelia Sorabji, Love and Life Behind the Purdah, ed. Chandani Lokugé (New Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 27.

almost superstitious faith in gaiety,<sup>33</sup> but Sita's attempt at evading quarantine is entirely modern, pouring phenyl and burning sulfur "to give the search party some confidence in her knowledge of preventative disinfection." (33) Her major concealment, however, is primitive: her old father and her feverish son are hidden in a tree, concealed by a green sari. While her charges are undetected, and her house passes the inspection, "a dark-browed Maratha" insists that Sita herself must be examined, since she was in "stricken houses" yesterday. (35) She attempts to negotiate with the "doctor lady," whom she knows from the mission school, but her modern sister will not save her:

"But," said Sita in dismay, "I promise faithfully to come to the hospital if I am ill. You know I have no ignorant prejudices."

"Ah, then, my child, be obedient now," was all the response she got. (35)

The final section of the story is barely three paragraphs. The segregation inspector finds, the next morning, on the road "the dead body of a young and gently nurtured woman," which on official examination yields the following "verdict": "death from that type of plague which lays a sudden grasp on the breaking heart...." (38) The mythological Sita dies, in the Ramayana legend, from the distrust of her husband and the patriarchal demands of society, and she is immediately swallowed by the earth. This Sita, in contrast, dies from the colonial administration of public health, and remains on paved ground.

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<sup>33</sup> "here and there a corpse would have been made even to simulate life. The great idea, however, seemed to be that cheerfulness disarmed suspicion" (32)

Sita's corpse is hardly the only dead female body in this short story collection, for Sorabji's fictionalization of Indian women's oppression not only transfigured its early twentieth century emblem, *purdah*, but also that nineteenth century icon, *suttee*<sup>34</sup> (*sati*). *Suttee* occupies an ambiguous place in Sorabji's moral imagination. Writing in 1908, she claims, "No one ever enforced widowhood. No one enforced *suttee*: no one to-day can really restrain *suttee*," for the official statistics simply do not reflect the abundance of women who still commit to their husbands in this manner. (Sorabji "The Nasal-Test" 100)

This reflection on *suttee* occurs in the middle of an essay on caste, which she claims was originally "merely a guide to marriage." (89) Caste for Sorabji can explain all sorts of customs, including early marriage and enforced widowhood.<sup>35</sup> It is through a

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<sup>34</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines *sati* as, first, "a Hindu widow who immolates herself on the funeral pile with her husband's body," and second, "as the immolation of a Hindu widow in this way." The first usage cited in the OED entry is 1786. The practice is outlawed by the British government in India in 1829, though it continues to occur, more in fiction than in fact, with one particularly controversial *sati*, Roop Kanwar, in Rajasthan in 1987. I will use Sorabji's spelling, "*suttee*," when discussing her work, and the more common spelling, "*sati*," when discussing contemporary scholarship on the practice.

<sup>35</sup> In Sorabji's 1908 account, caste marks a situation in which "the social and economic distinctions are merged in the religious, so that the feeling... is of a barrier placed by God, not man." (90) she contrasts this with the ways in which in the West a neighbor might presume equality in the Church but not in the Park; with Hindus, she says, it is the exact opposite. She even discusses the lived flexibility, albeit limited, of the caste system, including what M.N. Srinivas later theorized as *Sanskritisation*:

Further, we must remember that with Caste as a rule — *nascitur non fit*. There have been known people who used a semblance of tribal name to climb into a caste above their own; or again, take the "Eaters-in-relief-kitchens," a caste in Orissa made, we are told, of those who lost their original caste by accepting relief in famine time; and there are at our doors others, who by persistent self-restraint and imitation of the customs of a higher caste pass by courtesy, for such; but these do not deceive the elect into intermarriage. (91-2)

Consequently, despite "all this machinery of exclusiveness there is no condemnation one of another" (92), for the religious rule of not sharing "bread and water" "does not mean that I will not associate myself with you in other ways. True, I would not let my Zenana visit yours — my women are part of my religion — but you and I might play together, buy and sell together, work together, travel together. . . ." (92) She emphasizes, thus, that "this contamination against which I am bound to guard myself is ceremonial not moral. It is not because you would teach me to swear or lie or thieve that I cannot dine at your table, but



functionalist account of caste that Sorabji explains the usual oriental horrors, and it is also in talking about caste that her prose turns the most relativistic, and most difficult to follow. She mentions, for instance, the Hindu's horror at the Westerner's repeated usage of the same toothbrush, concluding: "Different civilizations, different notions of cleanliness. The point seems to be to learn each other's aversions and respect them." ("The Nasal Test" 95)

Suttee, then, for Sorabji is something that must be comprehended relativistically, if it is to be comprehended at all. Her explanatory framework is in keeping with Gayatri Spivak's suggestion that sati should have been read in the logic of martyrdom,<sup>36</sup> but with the crucial distinction that Sorabji's sati operates as the only truly agential female in the colonial scene. While she acknowledges that some women may have been coerced, she repeatedly insists that there exists such a person as "the real suttee," one who acts out of pure free will.<sup>37</sup> (101)

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because drinking water at your hands, and eating what has been cooked at your fire, is within the canonical 'Thou shalt not.' The odd thing is that until English education brought other ideas to the country, no one resented his place in life." (92-3) Cornelia Sorabji, "The Nasal-Test," Between the Twilights: Being Studies of Indian Women by One of Themselves (London and New York: Harper and Brothers, 1908).

<sup>36</sup> "Perhaps sati should have been read with martyrdom, with the defunct husband standing in for the transcendental One; or with war, with the husband standing in for sovereign or state, for whose sake an intoxicating ideology of self-sacrifice can be mobilized. In actuality, it was categorized with murder, infanticide, and the lethal exposure of the very old." Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 302.

<sup>37</sup> "Of course misuse of the practice crept in. Some women became suttee because it was expected of them. What tragedies there must have been! How the other women must have whispered.... And in each case it would have determined the undetermined. Again, one can imagine the woman who did not love suffering suttee in expiation, or in terror at her own gladness of release; or she who was not loved enough seeking it in pride or hunger of heart. Oh! the tragedies in that handful of ashes on the suttee stone. Then, again, there would be the Priest-made suttees, an increasing number as the years carried life further and further from the original ideal." Sorabji, "The Nasal-Test," 101.

The class of woman who for the kingdom of Heaven's sake became suttee before the Act of 1829, still is suttee, either actually in the old-time way, though by stealth and unnerved by the admiration of the onlooker, or in the life of religion and unselfishness. We have all known at least one such Saint living between her house of Gods and the cares of other people, ... who has learnt to live without any hope, save for him with whom she was forbidden to die. Perhaps the living sacrifice began when she was but twelve years of age . . . (101-2)

These widows are, to Sorabji, deserving of "the very crown of Sainthood." (102)

Sati in Sorabji seems to articulate what Achille Mbembe has termed the necropolitical, for sati, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whether in reformist texts or in Sorabji's fiction, is the death by fire of a woman already condemned to less than life. In this patriarchal and colonial context, the political order concerns itself with the distribution, regulation, and production of not life — which would be in keeping, for instance, with the practice of quarantine in the twentieth century U.S. — but death.<sup>38</sup> In such conditions, the preferred exercise of agency by the colonial subject becomes not just homicide but also, if not primarily, suicide. The logic of martyrdom enables an ecstatic form of politics within which the besieged body, never quite one's own, becomes not the domain of contestation but that of transcendence.<sup>39</sup> By submitting one's alienated body

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<sup>38</sup> From slavery, which is "a form of death-in-life" to colonial legality, "where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of a power outside the law," "colonies are zones in which war and disorder, internal and external figures of the political, stand side by side or alternate with each other." Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15.1 [39] (2003): 21, 23-24.

<sup>39</sup> "In the logic of martyrdom, a new semiosis of killing emerges. ...the body here becomes the very uniform of the martyr. But the body as such is not only an object to protect against danger and death. The body in itself has neither power nor value. The power and value of the body result from a process of abstraction based on the desire for eternity. In that sense, the martyr, having established a moment of supremacy in which the subject overcomes his own mortality, can be seen as laboring under the sign of the future. In other words, in death the future is collapsed into the present.

to a political and ethical order other than that of present reality, the colonized paradoxically reasserts agency at precisely the moment in which she submits to death.<sup>40</sup>

The reading of sati as martyrdom is, of course, that which enables the valorization of sati among right-wing Hindu groups in postcolonial India. These groups mobilize the idea of voluntary sati towards a patriarchal arrogation of female agency.<sup>41</sup> Yet whereas such celebrations valorize the female body which is burned to assert the sanctity of the sacrifice,<sup>42</sup> Sorabji's celebration of the women who become sati relies upon a devalued body for its ecstatic import. Sorabji's "living sacrifice" is a founding condition of Hindu womanhood, wherein one must live "between her house of Gods and the cares of other people." ("The Nasal-Test" 102) To accede to sati through the immolation of one's body is to escape this sacrificial order through, perversely, a

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"In its desire for eternity, the besieged body passes through two stages. First, it is transformed into a mere thing, malleable matter. Second, the manner in which it is put to death—suicide—affords its ultimate signification. The matter of the body, or again the matter which is the body, is invested with properties that cannot be deduced from its character as a thing, but from a transcendental nomos outside it. The besieged body becomes a piece of metal whose function is, through sacrifice, to bring eternal life into being. The body duplicates itself and, in death, literally and metaphorically escapes the state of siege and occupation." Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 37.

<sup>40</sup> "What connects terror, death, and freedom is an *ecstatic* notion of temporality and politics. The future, here, can be authentically anticipated, but not in the present. The present itself is but a moment of vision—vision of the freedom not yet come. Death in the present is the mediator of redemption." Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 39. 39

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of such arguments in the late twentieth century moment, see "The Subject of Sati" in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Real and Imagined Women (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> In the glorification of sati the facts of pain and death have to be granted, since it is their transcendence, or at the very least endurance, by the woman that becomes the signifier of value. ... The subjectification of the sati demands, not a devalued 'body for burning,' but a body invested with exceptional physical properties. Sunder Rajan, Real and Imagined Women 21.

different one. In men's anti-sati writings of the period, in contrast, the woman usually escapes sati only to die by other means.<sup>43</sup>

Sorabji's 1901 story, "A Living Sacrifice," mobilizes the trope of suttee towards the solidarity of sisterhood, offering neither imperial triumph nor nationalist progress, neither tradition nor modernity as the final goal. The story is explicitly set, in a subtitle, in "The Ganges Valley, 1828," and it begins with an unexplained paragraph, set apart from the body of the text:

"No, I *cannot*, Dwarki!" said little Tani. "I love this present life. I love everything.... And it is a joy beyond words when I have dyed my nails the right color, and donned my brightest garments, and painted the shadows 'neath my eyes, to the intent that [other women] may glare with envy.... And must all this come to an end? No more gambols or gay jewels, or even household duties; no more victories over the less fortunate! No! *No! I cannot!*" (Sorabji Love and Life Behind the Purdah 84)

Tani's resistance to sati involves neither moral imperative nor social justice, but simply an attachment to material amusements. Her husband has died at dusk, and at dawn "little warm, living, quivering Tani must be bound to [his] cold dead form" and set ablaze. Dwarki tells Tani that she wishes she had her opportunity: "To buy immortality for a husband, is not this the crown of life, the bliss of death!" She then, however, offers a fully material explanation for her desire for sati, for her life, "without husband or

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<sup>43</sup> Sunder Rajan notes that, in texts representing the "male indigenous reformist/liberal position on women's issues," that "in spite of not submitting to sati, the woman dies. The inhibition about representing the rescued widow with an after-life of romantic/sexual fulfillment with her rescuer is striking. What her death also implies is the impotence of her rescuer, an inability to work out her salvation that accurately reflects the perceived difficulties of social change (as opposed to the facility of official intervention). The failure also reflects an internalization of the notion that the colonized male was not 'man enough' to protect his womankind." Sunder Rajan, Real and Imagined Women 48.

child," is full of toil and suffering. Without Tani's knowledge, Dwarki drugs her and takes her place beside the corpse. (Sorabji Love and Life Behind the Purdah 85)

The first few sections are given to us in an imperfect past tense, including the quick section in which we are shown the funeral procession. The suttee scene, however, is written in a continuous present. The scene unfolds in a cinematic framing, switching from the omniscience of a third person to the distanced fascination of a technological and distinctly Western gaze. First, we are given a setting within which objects thought inanimate are playing a decisive role: "the drum is sounding the suttee proclamation." and on the pyre we witness "leaves which blush for shame at the uses to which men put them." (Sorabji Love and Life Behind the Purdah 87) Next, we are shown what the mechanical world of men: the activities of the brother, the village headman, and the priests, without any of their speech. Then, through a "meanwhile," we are shown the altar, with the lavish language that Sorabji usually dedicates to traditional assemblages. Finally, we shift back to the world of women, the world in which most of our narration is given:

Of Dwarki the women have taken charge. ... In the midst of her friends she stands, and unclasps one by one her ornaments. "Keep that necklace, Kashi! And you, Kamala, these anklets. Ofttimes they have tinkled accompaniment to our chatter, as we drew our morning bucket of water in glad companionship. This locket to my best friend. ..." (Sorabji Love and Life Behind the Purdah 88)

Sorabji provides an image of sati as human-inflicted death: "On the altar lay the victim of the gods, round the altar walked the victim of the priests." (89) Dwarki is

walking around the fire three times, each time handing out a bit of rice to each person present, a ritual which Sorabji glosses for us: "'God has bereaved me,' it meant; 'for you may there be plenty!'" (88) We then see the attempted intercession of "the engineer sahib," who upon seeing the crowd walked down and

arrived in time for the largess. As he put out his hand, "Lady of sorrow!" said he, speaking in her own tongue, "if you wish to escape this ghastly exaction, I and my household are at your service. I have but to call, and from the garden yonder will come men sufficient in number to effect your rescue." (88)

This man, later referred to as "the Western," arrives "in time for the largess" of this final, dramatic scene of femicide, in contrast to the ordinary terrors and infractions of Dwarki's femi-life. Dwarki refuses each of his three appeals. (88-9)

This scene depends upon the sentiments of nature for its affective charge, not upon those of mankind:

They bound her *to the burden* on the altar—the sweet smell of the incense perfuming the air, and the villager standing awed and silent. From the muddy depths of the sacred water a crocodile raised an inquisitive head, and the frogs croaked comment satisfactory. As far as eye could see stretched the featureless sand-banks, with here and there a line of dreary babuls. (Sorabji Love and Life Behind the Purdah 89)

We have, however, a surprising conclusion, for Tani is "flying" through the crowd, "horror, and yet relief, following upon comprehension as she glanced wildly around her."

"My sister!" she shrieked beside the motionless form.

Dwarki had closed her eyes in the quivering shudder of the awful contact; but she opened them once more on God's sky and on that piteous little face so close to hers. And... she smiled a humorous smile.

"Almost was that drug a waste!" she reflected.

For Tani had accepted the sacrifice!

The nature and significance of the sacrifice may be unclear to the reader, but the sati is here an agential martyr, not a murder victim.

Lata Mani has written of the concepts of "good satis" and "bad satis" that inhabit nineteenth century discourse on the practice.<sup>44</sup> The good sati is reflected, for instance, in the 1813 regulation that made voluntary satis legal, as long as they corresponded to an official reading of Hindu scripture.<sup>45</sup> (Mani "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India" 94) 'Religion' and 'tradition' in colonial discourse operated as structuring principles demanding unthinking and unconscious obedience; consequently, even though the discourse shows some concern with the *involuntary* sati (for instance, the woman who is drugged or dragged to the pyre), the question of the widow's will figures only in an oblique fashion.<sup>46</sup> Sati-as-subject<sup>47</sup> is an impossibility: the "good sati" is

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<sup>44</sup> I draw here on Lata Mani's early and influential essay, "Contentious Traditions," that appeared in the volume Recasting Women in 1989. For her longer, book-length treatment of the same topic, see Lata Mani, Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Colonial discourse on sati was explicitly invested in a type of socio-cultural regeneration that involved not "the imposition of a new Christian moral order" but "the recuperation and enforcement of the truths of indigenous tradition." Accordingly, the logic of religious accuracy invested partly in reeducation, but not in the replacement of one faith tradition by another. Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History, eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989) 95.

<sup>46</sup> Mani argues that the discourse surrounding the abolition of sati in 1829 operated within three widespread assumptions: "the centrality of brahmanic scriptures, unreflective indigenous obedience to these texts and the religious nature of sati." (92) Given the extensive scriptural preoccupations of this discourse, she asserts that it cannot be seen as "modernizing" in the sense of a desire to replace earlier religious structures with

a victim of tradition or religion, just as the “bad sati” is a victim of unscrupulous priests or relatives. (116) In this discourse, “Women were cast as either pathetic or heroic victims. The former were portrayed as beaten down, manipulated and coerced; the latter as selflessly entering the raging flames oblivious to any physical pain.” (97) Given the understanding of tradition operating here, however, “the portrayal of the immolated widow as heroine merely rewrites her as a victim of a higher order: not of man but of God (or religion).” (117)

Sorabji’s “suttee story” successfully, if strangely, maneuvers this representational bind. Sati “functions both as the act confirming the stoicism of women and as the practice that epitomizes their weakness,” leading to an “ambivalence” around “the *idea* of sati” for all sides in the debates. (Mani 106) Sorabji does not give up this valuable trope for women’s strength *and* weakness, in this figure joined together; she instead tries to wrench it out from the dimensions of gender, towards a “living sacrifice” that would be founded, quite literally, on solidarity of/as sisterhood. In Mani’s analysis, “women are neither subjects nor objects, but rather the ground of the discourse on sati.” (117) In

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the liberal tenets of rationality and free will; the suffering of women from the practice of sati figures rarely and obliquely in the discourse both for and against the practice. However, Mani argues that the discourse on sati in early nineteenth century colonial India was modern insofar as “it was a modern discourse on tradition”: “not a discourse in which pre-existing traditions are challenged by an emergent modern consciousness, but one in which both ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity as we know them are contemporaneously produced.” (116) Mani, “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India.”

<sup>47</sup> This process of what we might (anachronistically) term “desubjectivation” is assisted by the consistent infantilization of the widow: the sati is repeatedly described as a “tender child,” even though the majority of sats were, judging from the official records, “well past childhood.” The resistant sati, too, gets written out of the discourse around sati abolition: accounts of sats in which women resisted their immolation would emphasize not their resistance “but the barbarity of Hindu males in their coercion.” Mani, “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India,” 97-98.



“A Living Sacrifice,” however, suttee women becomes more than “the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated” (Mani 118) Sorabji’s own faith in “true suttee” is not necessarily inconsistent with this; after all, the double bind of heroine-as-victim produced by sati makes women in the social reform debates figure “shame *and* promise” at once. (Mani “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India”)

Sorabji’s 1901 collection provoked a wide variety of reviews.<sup>48</sup> Frequently relying upon metaphors about “lifting the veil for us,” these reviews repeatedly contextualize the volume within the context of a moral and imperial imperative, whether or not they feel that this imperative has been fulfilled.<sup>49</sup> Sorabji tends to be described as a Parsee lady (sometimes, lady in “flowing Parsee robes”) who studied at Oxford and “passed examinations which, had she been a man, would have qualified her to be called to the bar.” The details of the phrasing vary ever so slightly, but the structure is consistent: Sorabji has passed examinations, and the subordinate clause, “had she been a man,”

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<sup>48</sup> The reviews cited here are all from the Cornelia Sorabji collection, MSS Eur f165/197, India Office Records.

<sup>49</sup> “The aim of the book is to throw light upon points in which native custom may yield to the touch of civilization without any harm to the ideals that custom crystallises.” (*Yorkshire Post*, 5 Feb 1902) For the *Saturday Review*, these stories are simply another aspect of Sorabji’s long struggle to help women in purdah: “Miss Sorabji writes with knowledge and she writes with an object which she skillfully avoids obtruding. Her stories point to their own moral.” (28 Jan 1901) More generally, they also appreciate the intra-empire solidarity building possibilities WC of Anglophone fiction on this topic. “Any work that throws light upon the lives led by our sisters of the native races of India is sure of a welcome in this country....” (*Birmingham Post* 3 Jan 1902) The *Manchester Guardian*, however, observes that while “One is disposed to welcome any book that aims at helping the public at home to understand the people of India. It is possible, however, that some of the pages of Love and Life Behind the Purdah... may rather go to confirm misunderstanding. After all, not every educated Indian is a firebrand, nor are the wives of all Indian princes poisoned or expelled.” (*Manchester Guardian* 8 Jan. 1902)

“were she a man,” etc. allows us to understand the hypothetical import of her not-at-all hypothetical examinations.

While some reviews remark upon the brilliance of her use of English, others criticize her florid diction, which usually is assumed to be an Indian taint.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes, however, the taint and the fluency are compatible, as for the *Pall Mall Gazette*: “The writer has that marvellous [sic] command of English that so often surprises us in the educated Hindoo. Few English-women can write their own language so purely. They are full of the spirit of the East. The inevitable minor note runs through them all.” (9 Jan 1902)

The vast majority of the reviews seem certain of the accuracy and factual detail of her writings, often citing her personal background and professional experience to bolster this claim.<sup>51</sup> Others, however, are less sure. An extremely critical review, titled “Women

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<sup>50</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, for instance, finds that “she writes, not only without a trace of foreign idiom, but in singularly unaffected and graceful English.” (5 Feb 1902) And *The Statesman* claims, in a 1922 article entitled “Portia in India: Miss Cornelia Sorabji’s Career,” that “Her literary manner is polished up to and possibly beyond perfection. It reminds one of Stevenson in its almost excessive smoothness; nevertheless it is redeemed from being wearisome by the freshness and vivid sympathy by which it is inspired.” *The Spectator*, however, discerns a taint of the foreign in her writing: “Miss Sorabji’s style is unequal; when she is beginning her story and introducing the characters she is rather inclined to the use of long words, and there is a slightly foreign sound in her sentences, but when she comes to the realities of emotion or interest she writes simply and to the point.” (*The Spectator* 21 Oct 1901)

<sup>51</sup> The *Yorkshire Post* begins its review by saying, “We class as books to read rather than as fiction Love and Life Behind the Purdah ... because, although it is a book of stories, these are true pictures of Indian home-life.” The next line cites Sorabji as “probably the most cultured of Indian women” and mentions her academic credentials. (*Yorkshire Post* 5 Feb 1902) The *Birmingham Post* even claims, somewhat inexplicably, that “The pictures she gives us of the people, and especially of the women, and the lives that they lead, are quite photographic in their clearness and fidelity to detail.” (3 Jan 1902) The *Glasgow Weekly Mail*, selecting it for the book of the week, argues against the book-based knowledge of missionary articles, which claim authority when their information is second-hand. In contrast, they construct an accurate portrait from Sorabji’s collection, for “Though what she has given us in this volume is a dozen or so short stories, yet by making suitable selection of those portions which bear more or less on the condition of women in India, it

in India," takes Sorabji to task for her distortions of Indian material.<sup>52</sup> The review starts with "This is a book, written to point a moral, by a talented lady," and then attempts to disclaim the accuracy that Hobhouse claims for these fictions. According to this reviewer, Sorabji's Parsi Christian heritage means that she is not necessarily familiar with Hindus and Mohammedans.<sup>53</sup> Citing a series of errors in representation, he states that "It is necessary in justice to the Indian people and to modern India to point out that these tales do not, in Lord Hobhouse's phrase, 'hold up phases of Indian society to view.'" <sup>54</sup>

The strangeness of this fiction, often linked to its pathos, is repeatedly noted. To the extent that the pathos and melancholy are understood as a mark of the authentically Indian, they are seen as an admirable attribute in her fiction. In such an account, these stories leave you "more acquainted" with "the intimate life of the Indian people" than

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will be possible to present to our readers a more faithful picture of the Indian woman's lot than any mere description could give.

<sup>52</sup> This is found in the Cornelia Sorabji collection of the India Office Records, unfortunately without any publication details. See MSS Eur f165/197, IOR.

<sup>53</sup> "These graphic and well-told tales exhibit Miss Sorabji's command of English and knowledge of the customs of our own country. It does not, however, necessarily follow that the author is equally well-posted in Hindu and Mahomedan life, of which, at any rate, these tales offer by no means an accurate picture. A person born of Parsee or Parsee Christian parents or parent is not, it must be remembered, necessarily possessed of more knowledge of Hindus and Mahomedans, their languages and customs, than any other person of a different race or religion. The tales do not pretend to be narratives of facts, but as they follow Lord Hobhouse's preface it is well that readers should be upon their guard..." "Women in India," MSS Eur f165/197

<sup>54</sup> With their depictions of purdah and remarriage among Brahmins, and interactions between European planters and Hindu pundits, the "tone of the conversation of the East" and "the spirit of the East" cannot be discerned from the dialogues and speech in these stories; the inaccuracies of plot and practice mean that "these are impossible characters"; the spirituality of Urmi is more Omar Khayyam via Fitzgerald, not actual Indian religion; etc.

even “the longest residence among them” could accomplish.<sup>55</sup> For the *Daily Chronicle*, the strangeness and melancholy is a sign of both ethnic authenticity and artistic failure. The review starts by noting how Sorabji is one of the very few who can tell us anything about the veiled women of the East. The second paragraph, however, is less positive, arguing that she has not been able to convey her knowledge to others.<sup>56</sup> The reviewer concludes: “Miss Sorabji presents an alien life from an alien point of view.” (*Daily Chronicle* 16 Jan 1902) While this reviewer praises some of her stories, such as “The Pestilence at Noonday” and “A Living Sacrifice,” the final paragraph advises further acculturation if there is to be aesthetic achievement. Strangeness might promise authenticity, and hence “a success of curiosity,” but “an artistic success” requires that “Miss Sorabji herself must approach nearer to our Western point of view.”<sup>57</sup>

For *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Sorabji “is not a second Rudyard Kipling or even a Mrs. Steele,” because “though Miss Sorabji has many gifts of insight and sympathy, she has not that special talent of the writer which can re-create an unfamiliar

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<sup>55</sup> “The stories are told with a fine directness of method, and with unstressed humour and pathos; so told that while everything they tell is strange one understands it all, and the aspect of it all in Indian eyes; told, moreover, with unusual fascination.” (*Yorkshire Post* 5 Feb 1902)

<sup>56</sup> “But as every educated Englishwoman does not possess the talent to set the life of her country before the stranger, so this Indian lady shows that she possesses the knowledge without being able to convey it to others. These eleven stories of Indian native women are pitched on the same note of melancholy, deal with very much the same theme of self-sacrifice, and lift a corner of the veil that has hitherto screened this particular side of life from our gaze. But they do not touch us... Rather the effect is one of strangeness. Not only the landscape but the medium through which it is viewed are unfamiliar. All the springs of action are different from ours, and are not interpreted to us as a novelist of our own race would interpret them.”

<sup>57</sup> “Perhaps the very strangeness of the atmosphere may give this book a success of curiosity; but in order to make an artistic success Miss Sorabji herself must approach nearer to our Western point of view.”

society." ("Behind the Purdah," Lahore, 31 Dec 1901: 3-4) Unlike Kipling, who "regards Eastern topics from a Western point of view," "Miss Sorabji with all her culture retains the Eastern point of view, and herself needs interpreting to the Western mind." The reviewer then seems to hedge, uncertain as to whether this Eastern perspective is an additional benefit or simply an aggravation. He resolves the dilemma by making the task of familiarization part of the aesthetic labor of the novelist, the particular virtue of fiction. Sorabji might write with sympathy for her characters, but she needs to expand a bit more concern for the sympathies of her readers. In the example provided by this reviewer, we are exasperated by the tradition bound men and self-sacrificing women, and our "feeling of antagonism" testifies to her accuracy and the depth of cultural difference. Despite Sorabji's insider view of Indian women, however, "the function of the novelist" requires that she portray it for "outside spectators," a "faculty" which she lacks.<sup>58</sup> The consistently "sad endings," moreover, are monotonous and gratuitous.<sup>59</sup> This review ends by saying that, "if she intends to cater to Western readers in the future," she is advised "to lighten up the melancholy of her tales slightly more than she does."

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<sup>58</sup> "This feeling of antagonism is a testimony to the depth of the distinction between East and West, and a proof of Miss Sorabji's verisimilitude rather than the reverse. She sees the life of Indian women from the inside rather than the outside. But in order to fulfil [sic] the function of the novelist, she should see it from the inside, and portray it so that outside spectators should thoroughly understand it. This faculty she has not yet acquired." "Behind the Purdah." Lahore, 31 Dec 1901: 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> "All the stories, with almost one accord have what is known as sad endings. They issue with almost monotonous regularity in death or separation between the lover and the loved. In some cases the melancholy tendency is quite gratuitous."

This frustrating melancholy, however, is a mark of authenticity: "Through them all runs a tone of melancholy which is truly Indian and a simplicity which enhances the pathos." (*Saturday Review* 28 Dec 1901) One review declares, "Miss Sorabji, an Indian by birth and race, an Englishwoman by education, is more than all an Indian at heart." The proof of this claim, ostensibly, is the careful sympathy with which her characters, with their non-Western motivations and lifestyles, are detailed; complains the review, her stories are "told with pity for the superstitions of her people, are related with such sympathy that they bid fair to defeat their own object." (*Pall Mall Gazette* 9 Jan 1902)

For one reviewer, "Behind the Purdah," a story told from the vantage point of an Englishwoman doctor visiting a patient in the zenana, is singled out for special praise as the only story "in which the reader can feel that he is among the ordinary human beings of everyday life." This reviewer is exasperated by the foreignness of the other stories, and particularly their despondency; at the end of this review, he hopes that Sorabji's next fiction will be "in this lighter and more cheerful vein." ("Love and Life Behind the Purdah," 2 Jan 1902)

The *Pall Mall Gazette*, in direct contrast, argues for cultural consistency in good fiction. At the end of a mostly positive review, we are told that "The stories that deal with phases of Indian life, apart from Western civilization... are the best. For somehow the metallic clatter of civilization has a harsh, unpleasant sound when brought into close contrast with the dreamy spirit of the East." (9 Jan 1902) This is not entirely different

from Sorabji's own thoughts; in 1903 she writes of Steel: "The fact is wherever she introduces the West she strikes a wrong note, she spoils the harmony. It would seem that you cannot focus East and West together, even though your lens cover the group." (207)

Sorabji's curious purdah-fiction emerges amidst her complex views not only about feminism but also about fiction, as seen in her various works of literary criticism. Flora Annie Steel and Rudyard Kipling, for instance, are condemned as Orientalists in an extended 1903 essay, particularly for "the exaggeration of the unpleasant in Indian life" which for her here means the emphasis on "the lady of the bazaars," whose "methods and motives" are "transferred to the ladies in palaces, or to the gentle little child-wife in an ordinary Hindu household." (207) This telling of "sinister stories" intends to attract a certain reading public, even as it displays a failure of social reading: "The Indian visitor to London would be just as wrong if he argued about the typical English lady from a Gaiety girl." (208) It is also, however, a cultural operation of a specific sort: discussing Kipling's salacious depictions of the secluded women of palaces and upper class households, Sorabji concludes: "The Western observer presumes the worst from even a barred door." (208) In Steel, similarly, the zenana exudes a constant "suggestion of sex." This is all because, says Sorabji,

The Western imagination let loose in Eastern surroundings can conceive nothing but the unlawful. How can it be otherwise? The stage properties of what to a Western must be romance evolve romance of whatever sort,

and the most common to the Western mind is apparently the third person in a domestic drama. (209)

In 1933, just two years before her phenomenally successful memoir India Calling,<sup>60</sup> Sorabji not only explains “*the reason why a best-seller is a best seller*” (11, italicized in the original), but also provides a formula for “Books About India” which would serve as both a necessary and sufficient condition for success.<sup>61</sup> She cautions the

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<sup>60</sup> The influential nature of this volume can be easily assessed by the enormous volume and consistent enthusiasm of its reviews. Found in MSS Eur f165/195, IOR.

<sup>61</sup> Only found in the IOR collection, I reproduce much of it here:

if you write fiction, you must study carefully what the English public demands about India, before you draw towards you that unblemished first page of the writing block which most inspires you.

.... If you are writing of English society in a hill station, remember Rudyard Kipling is still the model. The stay-at-home Islander simply does not believe you if you give him any other version of play-time or work-time at Simla. As to ‘scenery’ the covers of ancient Missionary Magazines are the *locus classicus* on this subject; so you must multiply palm trees, with Englishmen and women in big solar tops sitting under them, and gazing out upon flooded rice fields. This may be varied by dense jungle, the head of a leopard or tiger poking out of the brushwood, and a snake uncoiling itself in mid-air from the heavy branch of a creeper-entangled tree....

If your characters are Indian, your plot should include the theft of an idol, or of the jewel out of the head of an idol or a Buddha: and bad luck must follow. Or there must be a faqir who pronounces curses, and there must be jugglers who do marvelous tricks, and there must be *hareems* (as the Islander calls them), scattered about indifferently in the house of Hindu or Moslem, with fearsome intrigues, poisoned daggers, and mysterious dungeons, and Westerners risking their lives to elope with imprisoned Ranis. ...

As for the characters themselves, the type is transitional at the moment. The most approved old type was the Indian Mystic, varied by the “professional widower,” or roue, and the beautiful secluded lady who pined for release. And the English spoken by the Oriental was what was known as “babu English,” which was like Spoonerisms *nascitur non fit*, and is therefore no more heard in the land or its literature. The England-returned one no longer wears a pink shirt front and patent leather shoes; he talks perfect English without any accent, and you must remember that he is interested in nothing but politics, and can give points to any Englishman on any subject whatsoever.

Your orthodox Hindu holy man is out of date in the conception of the Islander. If you wish to describe a Holy Man, you must build him on the Gandhi plan. He must talk Tolstoi and the New Testament, or the poetry written by Indians whom the West has discovered—which sweeps into it the religious influences and ideas of all the Worlds—and labels it “Indigenous Indian.” You must remember that there are no Purdahnashins left in India, all the women are emancipated and have taken degrees at English or



aspiring writer: “if you write fiction, you must study carefully what the English public demands about India, before you draw towards you that unblemished first page of the writing block which most inspires you.” She then gives us the recipe: familiar tropical flora and fauna for the setting; religious intrigues for the plot; and national-political clichés for characters. The final paragraph of this section becomes quite explicit in the emphatically political nature of the constitution of popular fiction. After describing a variety of other stock characters (for instance, the babu), Sorabji explains that “the orthodox Hindu holy man” has been reconfigured to coincide with Gandhi, while all women are now described as emancipated and educated at foreign universities. Combined with the subsumption of all possible political conflicts into an Indian-British racial problem, this recipe makes Passage to India precisely the best-selling book of the year. She concludes the article with a statement of belief about fiction quite generally: “For me, I believe that in the warning that a book, particularly about India, must catch and crystallize the reader’s preconceived notions; must, in short, reveal no more than the reader has the faculty for receiving—will be found the only recipe for a ‘best-seller.’”

(11)

Sorabji was an emphatically commercial author, whose career as a woman writer served to support her ambitions as a woman lawyer. She began publishing in the

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American Universities, if not locally: and the only problems are not indigenous and *inter nos*, (the depressed-classes problem excepted), but inter-racial, British versus Indian. Test Arnold Forster’s *Passage to India* by these general remarks. You will find the test holds. He is the latest ‘best-seller’ and has won the French Prize of the Year. (11)

*Nineteenth Century* during her university days in England, using the additional revenue to support herself during her search for work immediately after graduation. (Gooptu 62-4) Even into the late 1920s, by then well known in her particular line of work, she fantasized of quitting the struggle to get legal work and returning to London for a “life of writing” which struck her as simpler and more luxurious. (Gooptu 139) She continued in this Calcutta stint to supplement her meager legal income through writing, in *The Statesman* and elsewhere, commenting in a letter to Elena Rathbone, “One has to use the empty-ish days for writing—to boil the pot.”<sup>62</sup>

In Virginia Woolf’s treatise on women and fiction of 1928, *A Room of One’s Own*, in contrast, the “soup and salmon and ducklings” of an Oxon luncheon is the process by which “by degrees was lit, half-way down the spine, which is the seat of the soul, ... the more profound, subtle and subterranean glow which is the rich yellow flame of rational intercourse.” (5-6) The “plain gravy soup” of Fernham interrupts her reverie on poetry, having “nothing to stir the fancy” in it. (8)

For Virginia, soup produces fiction; for Cornelia, fiction produces soup.

My title for this chapter substitutes the “room” of Woolf’s aspirations for women and fiction, with the “cramped space” of Deleuze and Guattari’s minor literature treatise. It is also, of course, “cramped” in the sense that Woolf describes Charlotte Brontë: “at war with her lot,” that author cannot “help but die young, cramped and

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<sup>62</sup> Cornelia to Elena, 7 September 1926, MSS Eur f165/41, IOR. Quoted in Gooptu, *Cornelia Sorabji : India's Pioneer Woman Lawyer* 143.

thwarted.”<sup>63</sup> (34) The “cramped space” here is the “between the twilights” to which Sorabji repeatedly refers: a historical and intercultural liminality occupied not only by Sorabji but also by the *purdahnashin*. Whereas the room “sheltered them from the claims and tyrannies of their families” (Woolf 25), the *zenana* is precisely privacy as familial intimacy. Virginia’s room operates, it seems, primarily as a space from which the woman writer can depart, “to travel and to idle, to contemplate the future or the past of the world, to dream over books and loiter at street corners and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream.” (53) Even when Woolf feels that the domestic and quotidian that comprises so much of women’s lives is yet to be recorded, and must be recorded, she passes out again from this room of (feminine) domesticity into the wider urban landscape.<sup>64</sup> Virginia’s room, however, remains haunted by the very domesticity that it seeks to both inscribe—write into fiction—and escape—write as fiction. To describe “what happens when [a woman] goes into a room,” “the resources of the English

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<sup>63</sup> Reading *Jane Eyre*, Woolf comments: “the woman who wrote those pages had more genius in her than Jane Austen; but if one reads them over and marks that jerk in them, that indignation, one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely. She will write of herself where she should write of her characters. She is at war with her lot. How could she help but die young, cramped and thwarted?” Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929) 34.

<sup>64</sup> Ruminating on and to Mary Carmichael, Woolf laments of ordinary women’s lives: “For all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it. And the novels, without meaning to, inevitably lie.

“All these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded, I said, addressing Mary Carmichael as if she were present; and went on in thought through the streets of London feeling in imagination the pressure of dumbness, the accumulation of unrecorded life, whether from the women at the street corners with their arms akimbo, and the rings embedded in their fat swollen fingers, talking with a gesticulation like the swing of Shakespeare’s words; or from the violet-sellers and match-sellers and old crones stationed under doorways; or from drifting girls whose faces, like waves in sun and cloud, signal the coming of men and women and the flickering lights of shop windows.” Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 43-44.

language would be much put to the stretch," for "one has only to go into any room in any street for the whole of that extremely complex force of femininity to fly in one's face." (42-3) All those women, sitting indoors "all these millions of years," have permeated "the very walls... by their creative force." Virginia's room is both a space of writing and a space that demands to be written,<sup>65</sup> not unlike Cornelia's cramped space as both a literal zenana and a crisis of figuration.<sup>66</sup>

Cornelia's cramped space, however, travels with you, structuring your experience of all space, regardless of physical location: it cannot simply be left behind. The purdah party, so simply satirized in Forster's "best-seller," is perhaps the best example of this mobile cramped space, for it extends as a social rite in ways that are precisely collectivizing and mobilizing.<sup>67</sup> Sorabji's first airplane flight in 1920 was a purdah party held on an airplane (Gooptu 105), and in 1917 she argues for the founding of a "Purdah Park." (Sorabji The Purdahnashin 54)

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<sup>65</sup> "One goes into the room—but the resources of the English language would be much put to the stretch, and whole flights of words would need to wing their way illegitimately into existence before a woman could say what happens when she goes into a room. The rooms differ so completely; they are calm or thunderous; open on to the sea, or, on the contrary, give on to a prison yard; are hung with washing; or alive with opals and silks; are hard as horsehair or soft as feathers—one has only to go into any room in any street for the whole of that extremely complex force of femininity to fly in one's face. How should it be otherwise? For women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics." Woolf, A Room of One's Own 42-3.

<sup>66</sup> See Fredric Jameson's discussion of the "crisis of figurability," for instance in Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film."

<sup>67</sup> This is the case with one of the first anecdotes in Rokeya's Oborodhbashini; where the tragedy of purdah happens in that one of the women does not descend from her palki (carriage) on arrival and ends up missing the entire evening, spending it terrified in her curtained palki.

Woolf yearns for fiction in which the relations between women would be more complicated, and further explored, a process which she likens precisely to “light[ing] a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been. It is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping.” (40) Woolf’s Mary Carmichael works “to catch those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of moths on the ceiling, when women are alone, unlit by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex.” (40-1) This “vast chamber,” with its “half lights and profound shadows,” of women’s relations amongst each other when devoid of the other men, is precisely Sorabji’s topic when writing of purdah, yet as Sorabji’s corpus demonstrates, this space too is cramped, if differently from Brontë’s struggles with Jane.

Woolf’s five hundred pounds a year comes from her aunt who falls off a horse in Bombay, an event contemporaneous with the granting of suffrage to women and “infinitely the more important.” (18) This allows her to withdraw from the occupations through which she used to support herself, the first two examples of which were writing jobs (journalism and reportage), but not of fiction.<sup>68</sup> Her aunt’s legacy “unveiled the sky”

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<sup>68</sup> “My aunt, Mary Beton, I must tell you, died by a fall from her horse when she was riding out to take the air in Bombay. The news of my legacy reached me one night about the same time that the act was passed that gave votes to women. A solicitor’s letter fell into the post-box and when I opened it I found that she had left me five hundred pounds a year for ever. Of the two—the vote and the money—the money, I own, seemed infinitely the more important. Before that I had made my living by cadging odd jobs from newspapers, by reporting a donkey show here or a wedding there; I had earned a few pounds by addressing

to Woolf, making possible an intellectual and artistic life, instead of one of heterosexual vassalage. (41)

This language of veiling and unveiling returns at strategic moments in Woolf's narrative: the fertile mind of the successful writer requires freedom and peace, so "The curtains must be close drawn." (50) Most significantly, however, it appears in her lament that women like Currer Bell, George Eliot, and George Sand, whose writings reveal them to be "all the victims of inner strife," "sought ineffectively to veil themselves using the name of a man." This amounts to a detestable homage to female anonymity, here conflated with feminine invisibility: "The desire to be veiled still possesses them." The echo here of the colonized Orient is not incidental, for the paragraph immediately moves to a discussion of male colonization and proprietorship, over tombstones, signposts, women, dogs, "a piece of land or a man with curly black hair." In contrast, claims Woolf, "It is one of the great advantages of being a woman that one can pass even a very fine negress without wishing to make an Englishwoman of her."<sup>69</sup> (Woolf 24)

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envelopes, reading to old ladies, making artificial flowers, teaching the alphabet to small children in a kinder garden. Such were the chief occupations that were open to women before 1918. ... To begin with, always to be doing work that one did not wish to do, and to do it like a slave, flattering and fawning, not always necessarily perhaps, but it seemed necessary and the stakes were too great to run risks; and then the thought of that one gift which it was death to hide—a small one but dear to the possessor—perishing and with it my self, my soul,—all this became like a rust eating away the bloom of the spring, destroying the tree at its heart. However, as I say, my aunt died; ... Indeed my aunt's legacy unveiled the sky to me, and substituted for the large and imposing figure of a gentleman, which Milton recommended for my perpetual adoration, a view of the open sky." (18-9 ch 2)

<sup>69</sup> "Currer Bell, George Eliot, George Sand, all the victims of inner strife as their writings prove, sought ineffectively to veil themselves by using the name of a man. Thus they did homage to the convention, which if not implanted by the other sex was liberally encouraged by them (the chief glory of a woman is not to be talked of, said Pericles, himself a much-talked-of man) that publicity in women is detestable. Anonymity runs in their blood. The desire to be veiled still possesses them. They are not even now as concerned about

Even though Woolf celebrates that Aphra Behn made “her living by her wits” and “proved that money could be writing,” she does not actually develop that insight beyond a directive to the women in her audience: in fact, commercial success seems to work against Behn in Woolf’s narrative, for “the importance of that fact outweighs anything that she actually wrote.” (30) Moreover, Behn causes us to “come to town and rub shoulders with ordinary people in the streets,” leaving behind “those solitary great ladies” who wrote “shut up in their parks among their folios,” “without audience or criticism, for their own delight alone.” (30) Even though with the earning of money by writing “begins the freedom of the mind,” for “Money dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for,” (30) this historically significant event cannot be read in concert, it seems, with aesthetic or creative significance—which, after all, takes place for Woolf in chambers and caves and rooms with the curtains close drawn, not in the streets.

Sorabji’s very different relation to closed spaces of female intimacy, combined with her reliance on fiction not only for intellectual stimulation but also for income, means that she cannot be read productively within the influential body of scholarship on women’s writing which draws its intellectual genealogy from Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own. While such scholarship can arguably be applied to non-raced women writers of

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the health of their fame as men are, and, speaking generally, will pass a tombstone or a signpost without feeling an irresistible desire to cut their names on it, as Alf, Bert or Chas. must do in obedience to their instinct, which murmurs if it sees a fine woman go by, or even a dog, *Ce chien est a moi*. And, of course, it may not be a dog, I thought, remembering Parliament Square, the Sieges Allee and other avenues; it may be a piece of land or a man with curly black hair. It is one of the great advantages of being a woman that one can pass even a very fine negress without wishing to make an Englishwoman of her.” Woolf, A Room of One’s Own 24.

empire such as the British Flora Annie Steel or the Canadian Sara Jeannette Duncan, the operations of faciality on the category of the *native* woman writer significantly complicate her relations to privacy, secrecy, and geography. Instead, then, of this particular vein of gendered criticism, I want to suggest that Cornelia Sorabji's writing tends towards what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari famously called a "minor literature," though for rather different reasons than Kafka's.<sup>70</sup> A minor literature is the literature constructed by a minority within a major literature, and it is characterized by "the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation." (Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature 18)<sup>71</sup> Sorabji's fiction refuses to provide the native information that the

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<sup>70</sup> Deleuze and Guattari outline three characteristics of a minor literature. First, a minor literature is "that which a minority constructs within a major language" and "in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization." Moreover, "everything in them is political. In major literatures, in contrast, the individual concern (familial, marital, and so on) joins with other no less individual concerns, the social milieu serving as a mere environment or background... Minor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it." Third, "in it everything takes on a collective value," for "what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement. The political domain has contaminated every statement (*énoncé*)." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, trans. Dana Polan, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 16-17.

<sup>71</sup> Sorabji, however, has decisively *not* attracted the literary acclaim accorded to the hero of Deleuze and Guattari's narrative, Franz Kafka; instead, she is the writer of melodramatic fiction, within a colonial context, from a colonial subject position. The manly European Kafka "will tear out of Prague German all the qualities of underdevelopment that it has tried to hide; he will make it cry with an extremely sober and rigorous cry." Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature 26. "Sober and rigorous" certainly do not describe our Parsi mem-sahib Sorabji; all I am suggesting is that she may still be involved, albeit differently, in a "minor literature" project to "bring language slowly and progressively to the desert. To use syntax in order to cry, to give a syntax to the cry." (26)



prefatory material promised: it is impossible to read her fiction, with its intentionally archaic English and florid poetic frame, as though it were a work of ethnography.<sup>72</sup>

As a woman writing empire, in the form of entertainment, for the readership of the metropole regarding the (ladies of the) periphery, the terrain of English is littered with generic and stylistic expectations that cannot simply be avoided or abandoned. This is a literary internationalism which gestures from one domestic feminine space to another, marking in the process the disjuncture, not only between private and public, domestic and foreign, but between the large gestures of imperialism's male homosociality and those of a feminine homosociality which is still internationally aware. Sorabji writes melodramatic romance fiction, fiction so saturated with stereotype and hyperbole that it tends towards the nonsensically excessive, and which operates through a cast of types so overdetermined that the individuating tendencies of realism no longer hold.<sup>73</sup> Within the "cramped space" of Anglophone discourses around Indian women, there is no way in which Sorabji's characters can be read or recognized by her Anglophone readership as "completely individualized entities." (Deleuze and Guattari Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature 16) Instead, the Indian-language names operate as simultaneously individuating and typifying, because of their very valued, fetishized,

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<sup>72</sup> This is in contrast to, for instance, Burton, Dwelling in the Archive : Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India 70.

<sup>73</sup> I am thinking here of Ian Watt's claim that "the novel is surely distinguished from other genres and from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualization of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment." Ian Watt, "The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding," Theory of the Novel, ed. Michael McKeon 369.

Indianness: the names “set the characters in the context of a large body of expectations primarily formed from past literature, rather than from the context of contemporary life.” (I. Watt 369) As a final refusal, Sorabji keeps killing her protagonists. In the place of narrative resolution, we find a female corpse.

Sorabji’s English is already “in the desert”: as a racially marked colonial subject writing in a major language, her use of English is always at risk of imperial scorn. The Anglo-Indian fiction of the white Canadian Sara Jeannette Duncan shares many of Sorabji’s ironic insights, the vision of an outsider whose aspects are both natively informed and yet internally distanced. Her narratorial voice, too, frequently marks its own position, never neglecting to remind the reader of how stories are changed by the voices that tell them. Yet Duncan’s fiction is stable in its tropology: when we distance ourselves from the stereotypes of her fiction, we always do so through a return to the center, to the metropolitan values she assumes us to share. With Sorabji, there is no such avenue of escape: the main characters die, and we remain pinned up close to them.

This originality is where her work responds to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the programmatic imperative of minor literature. Sorabji’s fiction “kills all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation,” not with the lauded aridity of Kafka’s naturalism but through an excess of irony which makes impossible the allegoresis the story initially promised. Even as she gives us proper names (Dwarkan, Tani), proper places (the Ganges Valley), and even a temporal situation

(1828, starting at dusk on one day and ending the next afternoon), Sorabji rams her stereotypes against each other, colliding suttee with sisterhood, and Western ethics with suttee's benefits, so that the moral we were promised — "A Living Sacrifice!" — is not finally discernible. Neither completely believable in a realist sense, nor completely deniable for a racist-imperialist readership, Sorabji's "living sacrifice" is metaphor and symbol without "any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the word." (Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature 22)

The operations of Sorabji's fiction can be usefully contrasted with the very different work of her contemporary Flora Annie Steel. Steel's phenomenally popular Mutiny novel, On the Face of the Waters (1903), demonstrates the ways in which the historical romance of imperialism and of feminism can proceed smoothly together.<sup>74</sup> The novel plots a triumphant tale of white feminist progress precisely by stabilizing the colonial domestic sphere. The protagonist, Kate Erlton, is trapped in Delhi during the Mutiny, under the care of an Englishman, Jim Douglas, and she must live as though in purdah to prevent her being discovered. Yet Kate is able to transform her purdahnashin experience into the idyllic romance of the Victorian home, producing a happy family scene, complete with an angelic little blond boy, which the deluded native woman, the sati Tara Devi, envies and cannot achieve. In On the Face of the Waters, consequently,

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<sup>74</sup> Steel adheres to "a colonial historiography that records the massacre of English women as yet another example (besides sati and female infanticide) of the Indian male's disregard for women's lives" and "represent[s] Indian women as the chief instigators of sepoy crimes." Jenny Sharpe, Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 87.

“the problem of the Anglo-Indian family is resolved through the native woman’s desire”: not only does Tara Devi constitute and cohere the happy Anglo-Indian home through her envious gaze upon Kate’s position within it, but this successful Victorian domesticity is precisely the only desire which makes the would-be sati want to live.<sup>75</sup> (Sharpe 108) Steel’s heroine not only survives but also benefits from 1857; she “takes away from the experience a lesson in self-dependency and thus is ‘rescued’ from the domestic life that had previously stifled her.” (Sharpe 88)

The production of the novel requires the production, whether antecedent or contemporaneous, of the domestic sphere as a comprehensible and consistent zone. This is in part Nancy Armstrong’s pioneering argument with respect to eighteenth and nineteenth century England, in which fiction, and particularly the novel, “helped to formulate the ordered space we now recognize as the household, made that space totally functional, and used it as the context for representing normal behavior.” (Armstrong 24) In so doing, Armstrong argues, “fiction contested and finally suppressed alternative bases for human relationships,” yet the operation in the British colonies was perhaps more complex. Writing in the twentieth century, when “the fiction of domesticity exists as a fact in its own right” (Armstrong 251), work like Sorabji’s attempts to reverse the operation, working to reveal the essentially political bases of the most secluded

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<sup>75</sup> “The narrative function of the Rajput widow is to stabilize the Victorian ideal of womanhood so that the Mutiny role of the English woman might be realigned. ... Tara, who is a mystery to even herself, holds together Anglo-Indian domesticity precisely where it begins to unravel.” Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire : The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* 109.

domesticities while simultaneously refusing and resisting the deployment of these zenanas as, in Mani's language, neither subjects nor objects, but sites of political contestation.

In conditions of non-settler colonialism, particularly in concert with racism, the production of a coherent domestic becomes more and more precarious.<sup>76</sup> As and where the production of a "coherent private sphere" breaks down, as when imperial cultural and racial prejudice meets imperialism's avowed liberal feminism, fiction as usual breaks down as well. Purdah, which emblemizes the upper class Indian colonial private, is a particularly frequent site for this dilemma, but it is not the only one. The private scene of the Anglo-Indian couple (or family) is also fractured, and imperial fiction like Steel's or Forster's relies upon (but does not engage) the figure of purdah to stabilize the colonizer's domesticity. No matter how brittle or artificial that colonial private might be, as in Passage, it is precisely the impossible incoherence of the colonized's privacy, typified in Aziz's photograph of his dead wife, which makes the imperial private, and the imperial romance, congeal.

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<sup>76</sup> I am thinking in particular of Duncan's The Imperialist, which shows a perfectly coherent, consistent, and stable narrative form (and domestic sphere), without any of the saturated fragmentation of her Anglo-Indian fiction. That novel discusses white settler society in colonial Canada, without any sustained consideration of native populations. In contrast, her fiction set in India discusses white colonials against a barely discernable, yet decidedly incomprehensible and disquieting, backdrop of Indian natives; as and when the natives begin to intercede in the domestic, her work becomes markedly fragmentary, and pessimistic in its inability to endure and rise to the heights of, say, imperial or anti-imperial allegory. See Sara Jeannette Duncan, The Imperialist (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903). Sara Jeannette Duncan, The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), or Sara Jeannette Duncan, "A Mother in India," The Pool in the Desert (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903).

Aziz's purdah-photo, as it were, might also signal the ways in which the purdah of late empire is akin to what D. A. Miller described as the "open secrets" of the Victorian novel. Miller argues that the novel works to move "policing out of the streets, as it were, into the closet—I mean, into the private and domestic sphere on which the very identity of the liberal subject depends." (Miller viii-ix) The Victorian novel establishes the "question of family" as the "object of struggle" in a complicated interplay between its function as both discipline and refuge,<sup>77</sup> and this relates in Miller to the question of interiority, where "the embarrassing risk of *being too personal* all too often comes to coincide with its opposite in the dismal fate of banality, of *not being personal enough*."<sup>78</sup> (Miller 105, 93) Following Miller's thoughts on secrecy and individual subjectivity, cultural secrecy as a form of collective subjectivity, exemplified in this instance by the zenana, produces the landscape of a modern subcontinent precisely by seeking to determine its othered spaces: a no longer primitive collective, produced precisely by not quite talking about it.<sup>79</sup> And this is not only for Sorabji, but also for

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<sup>77</sup> "Envisioning the family now as a firm counterweight to social institutions, now as a docile function of them, here as the insufferable refuge from the carceral, there as the insufferable replica of it, the novel poses the question of the family, which it thereby designates as the object of struggle." D. A. Miller, The Novel and the Police (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1988) 105.

<sup>78</sup> "For we are all well acquainted with those mortifying charges (sentimentality, self-indulgence, narcissism) which our culture is prepared to bring against anyone who dwells in subjectivity longer or more intensely than is necessary to his proper functioning as the agent of socially useful work. ... And those envious charges have at least this much truth in them, that the embarrassing risk of *being too personal* all too often comes to coincide with its opposite in the dismal fate of banality, of *not being personal enough*." Miller, The Novel and the Police 193.

<sup>79</sup> For Miller, "secrecy would seem to be a mode whose ultimate meaning lies in the subject's formal insistence that he is radically inaccessible to the culture that would otherwise entirely determine him. I cannot, therefore, resolve the double bind of a secrecy that must always be rigorously maintained in the face of a secret that everybody already knows, since this is the very condition that entitles me to my subjectivity

Forster: the photograph of Aziz's dead wife, lying in a drawer, is kept secret just as, in life, his wife kept strict purdah and was not seen, either. The production of the face of this woman, through first the taking and then the extraction of the photograph – particularly the photograph, with its elements of the ghostly, its capture not of memory but of “the residuum that history has discharged” (Kracauer 429) – works to solidify Forster's characters as well as the contemporaneous aspirations of his realist novel.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps this explains, in part, Woolf's insistence on leaving the room to which she dedicates the title and ostensible subject of her talk. To secure “a room of one's own” as a space of private interiority requires a form of writing in which “its defining inwardness is most secret, most withheld from writing.” (Miller 200) Writing the zenana, then, to “boil the pot,” might be just as productive of the kind of secret space to which Woolf's fiction writing manifesto aspires. The ruptures caused by purdah are not, moreover, restricted to writing in English. The Bengali writing of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, writing on the purdah and the zenana in the same period, is similarly episodic. It is not, however, fragmentary at the level of the sentence. Rokeya's sentences hold together, neatly and completely, even in her most political moments of enunciation,

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in the first place. But the double bind is not at all the same thing as a dead end, and if I cannot speak of myself without losing myself in the process, I can keep myself secret and – “so to speak” – change the subject: convinced of my indeterminability in the safety of silence, as I speak of – and seek to determine – somebody or something else.” Miller, *The Novel and the Police* 195.

<sup>80</sup> This is in some sense general to the realist novel, which “establishes the opposition between the private-domestic and the social-institutional (1) within the representation... ; (2) as a formal practice of consumption, in which the novel-reading subject shuttles to and fro between the home in which the novel is read and the world in which it is verified; and (3) at the intersection of the novels' own representational practice with the represented practice of institutions that it includes in its content.” Miller, *The Novel and the Police* 98.

whereas Sorabji's sentences become unstable, her clauses improperly subordinated. Under-writing the zenana not only secures other spaces of women's refuge and aspiration as authentically private ("one's own") and perhaps secret, but also provides the margins and interstices in which the reader of such fiction can locate herself.<sup>81</sup>

Sorabji's reluctance to produce stable regimes of meaning in her fiction can be linked to her refusal to commit to a progress narrative in her politics. This is particularly remarkable in her disavowal of feminism, for the liminality of "between the twilights" articulates for Sorabji both the position of the ignorant purdahnashin and that of the deluded emancipated woman.<sup>82</sup> Whereas the bulk of reformist efforts continue to focus on the two less modern sections, which she calls the "strictly orthodox" and the "progressives," Sorabji is also concerned with the most modernized or liberated.<sup>83</sup> The

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<sup>81</sup> "The Novel protects subjectivity not by locking it in, in the manner of a box, but by locking it out, since the story always determines the destiny of *somebody else*." Which is also to say, the reader of the novel finds himself *not* through identification with the characters but through his own facelessness in the novel-reading process: "Entirely given over to the inner life and its meditations, constantly made to exceed the readerly determinations he both receives and practices, this subject finds himself not where he reads, but—between the lines, in the margins, outside the covers—where he does not. (Another open secret that everyone knows and no one wants to: the immense amount of daydreaming that accompanies the ordinary reading of a novel.)" Miller, *The Novel and the Police* 215.

<sup>82</sup> Sorabji uses "between the twilights" explicitly in a 1932 article in *World-Radio* to discuss the most modernized section of Indian women, which she terms "the emancipated." Sorabji, Cornelia. "Broadcasting and India's Future: What May Be Done for India's Women." *World-Radio* 18 Nov 1932. 1136. MSS Eur f165/196, IOR.

<sup>83</sup> Sorabji differentiates among three segments of contemporary Indian women: the emancipated, the progressive, and the strictly orthodox. The orthodox, which includes Sorabji's purdahnashin, need not legislative reform, or even education; instead, the reformer's task is to create desire, for the vote, for "what social enlightenment has to offer." The progressives are "women feeling their way out of the past, who are not unwilling to listen to the gospel of social enlightenment. ... the women [who] are timidly adventuring the street, albeit with veiled faces." While these two categories of Indian women continue to constitute the central preoccupations of reformist efforts, Sorabji is also concerned with that seemingly triumphant lot, the "emancipated." Her suggestions, provided at the end of this article, are as follows:



emancipated refers to" the almost denationalised Indian woman" who "while professionally equipped, ... has no traditions of public service, no civic sense, and, in short, no compass to guide her 'between the twilights' on the rolling uplands of freedom upon which circumstance has thrust her." The emphasis on circumstance is, of course, significant for Sorabji; writing with the bitterness of "a pioneer" of the generation of women who came after, she asserts: "England has equipped her for service. The universities and all professions are open to her on equal terms with men. She was enfranchised under the Reforms of 1919. She has had to fight for nothing." The problem is not only one of personal history but also of personal presentation:

She speaks English perfectly; is often unacquainted with her mother-tongue and the customs of her race. Dressing *à la mode*, she scorns the garments worn by her great-grandmother. Quite natural; but it means that she is thus disqualified by lack of sympathy for helping the orthodox to catch up with modern progress. There lies the tragedy, for it is to her, chiefly, that the India of the future must look for bridge-building.

This woman is still within patriarchy, for she is routinely exploited by clever male politicians, who see her value as a political asset and take advantage of her "untrained" judgment.<sup>84</sup> Whereas the political mobilization of traditional Indian women

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FOR THE EMANCIPATED: Education in social service, its history and ideals, with descriptive illustrations of centres...; talks on careers for women; Economics...; caste, and our own ancient institutions; the franchise, its history, the hard work and responsibilities which it involves; political machinery generally.

FOR THE PROGRESSIVE: Encouragement to emerge further; teaching as to her responsibility for service of the orthodox; gradual and general enlightenment; vocational talks.

FOR THE ORTHODOX: As for the progressives, the gospel of health, sanitation, education, and service; simple talks on public affairs and the part women must play in the new India.

<sup>84</sup> "The clever politician realizes the asset he has in emotional women — clever women, too, quick and adaptable, amazing in new gifts of public speaking and conference organization, in a new love for the

was in the service of traditionalist men, the mobilization of these political emancipated women is, in Sorabji's estimation, still in the service of the men who lead them. The emancipated "dance" behind "extremist politicians," "remembering suttee and self-blinding": just as "her forebears worshiped man in seclusion, she follows him blindly into the open. She stops at nothing when he calls."

Sorabji's views on the impossible paucity of the modern Indian woman—here synonymous with the feminist Indian woman—can be related to her distaste for transnational feminism quite generally. Marked in a repeated insistence on ethnographic detail and local specificity, Sorabji's political agenda is one in which location is everything. "It is a delusion," she says, "to think that we can invariably do the best for others by giving them what suits ourselves," laying claim to an international practice which assumes that cross-cultural comparisons are more mystifying than elucidating. Comparing "the liberty of English girls" with "the infant-marriages of Indian children," for instance, is akin to "start[ing] a mission to clothe the children of tropical regions in *furs*, because *English* children suffer from the severity of a northern winter." ("Stray Thoughts of an Indian Girl" 639) Writing against Englishwomen's the attempts to extend franchise to Indian women, she says that these "kind people who wish to secure for us the privileges of western women" do not understand the difficulties produced by

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limelight.... He has exploited woman at every point, using her trust and her graces for his own ends. But her judgment is untrained...."

“legislative expedients.”<sup>85</sup> Sorabji reminds her reader: “The charming emancipated women of Hindu and Moslem race with whom London is now familiar did not obtain their own freedom from infant marriage or such like bondage of customary law and religion by act of the Legislature, but through the education and voluntary action of their immediate forbears.” (“Stray Thoughts of an Indian Girl”)

Sorabji thus refuses the allegorical and analogical structures of imperial feminism, which is able to propose a coherent vision of progress by positing the liberated ‘new woman’ as the future, placing the feminist Englishwoman slightly behind her, and her poor benighted cousins, Indian women, far behind. Allegory requires that “the allegorical sign” – for instance, Steel’s Kate Erlton – “refer to another sign that precedes it”; consequently, “the meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition*... of a previous sign,” requiring each and every Kate to be backed by a series of historical figurations whose anteriority can thereby testify to the allegory’s impetus towards temporal progress.<sup>86</sup> (de Man 207) Allegories of feminism, much like allegories of empire (Sharpe), cannot, because of their very form, avoid assignations of modernity and pre-modernity, liberation and barbarism, perhaps

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<sup>85</sup> The attempt to give purdahnashin women a voting booth in a local girls’ school, for instance, resulted in their being impersonated by “women of the town,” (says Sorabji: “Ease of deception is the worst of the veil!) and, thereafter, families refusing to send their girls to the school. “Some Comedies of Polling Day in India: The Veiled Woman Votes.” *Evening News* 1 Aug 1933: 45. MSS Eur f165/196

<sup>86</sup> In allegory we have “a relationship between signs in which the reference to their respective meanings has become of secondary importance. But... it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition*... of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this sign to be pure anteriority.” Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, revised ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 207.

indicating that perhaps a “feminist allegory” will always be, by definition, either insufficiently feminist or insufficiently allegorical. Sorabji’s refusal of allegory, then, can be linked to the historical plot of liberal feminism, whether nationalist or imperialist, which she so adamantly denounces. Her embrace of the time “between the twilights,” similarly, might be an embrace of time as culturally constructed, something experientially but not intellectually understood. For de Man, moreover, allegory precisely allocates “a distance in relation to its own origin,” renouncing the symbol’s promise of possible “identity or identification” and “the nostalgia and the desire to coincide.” Established “in the void of this temporal difference,” allegory enables the full and painful recognition of the distinction between the self and the non-self, prohibiting the kinds of awkward, surprising, and even embarrassing coincidences that occur in Sorabji’s fiction. The isolation and cultural liminality of the educated modern woman in India proves uncannily similar to that of the uneducated native woman in purdah, and yet the differences between cultures make clear parallels and identifications impossible. Unable to commit to a forward-moving liberal ethos (which would moor their contemporaries in purdah in the past) or to a relativist transcultural solidarity (which would place them exactly in the same modern moment with the authors), women writers like Sorabji, Duncan, or Rokeya fail to provide the allegorical dimension of language. Instead of the grand sweep of historical romance and allegory, we read the presentism of the fragment, portrait, scene, or sketch.

What ruptures the text is *not* gender as such; nor, for instance, is purdah the unrepresentable or the unsayable.<sup>87</sup> Instead, the coincidence of purdah, women's writing, and late empire configures a literary dilemma which might illuminate the demands that narrative fiction makes upon its source material. In the medium of photography, in contrast, women's seclusion and the women's quarters provide not an impediment but a productive basis for the development of the genre, as demonstrated in Malek Alloula's work on the colonial postcard in the Maghreb of same period.<sup>88</sup> Unlike

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<sup>87</sup> Another way in which to articulate this generic problem, to separate, at least temporarily, the problem of literary representation from the historical or political problem of representation, is offered in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*.<sup>87</sup> This novel presents a sort of doubled dilemma in attempting to figure both the English woman Susan Barton and the African slave Friday into Defoe's canonical 1719 novel, *Robinson Crusoe*. Not only representation but presentation, not only elocution but also articulation, are put into question by the combination of sexism and racism, slavery and patriarchy, as and when they encounter the demands of the English novel as a genre. The question of form begins in *Foe* in the second part of the novel, with the somewhat desperate epistles of Susan Barton, who seeks Daniel Defoe's assistance to formulate her story of Cruso into a novel.

"Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr Foe: that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth (I see that clearly, we need not pretend it is otherwise). To tell the truth in all its substance you must have quiet, and a comfortable chair away from all distraction, and a window to stare through; and then the knack of seeing waves when there are fields before your eyes, and of feeling the tropic sun when it is cold; and at your fingertips the words with which to capture the vision before it fades. I have none of these, while you have all." J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*, 1st American ed. (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Viking, 1987) 51-2.

What is striking in this passage is the acuity with which Barton can capture the genre, as it were, of a truly authorial moment; she can produce the full substance of the fiction of fiction, while she cannot bring up the fiction of truth. At the end of the novel, however, we are well beyond this desire, as it were, for five hundred pounds a year and a lock on the door. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*. The narratorial "I" arrives at a scene of shipwreck. To the question, "what is this ship?" the text delivers a stream emanating from the dead mouth of the dead Friday, a chain around his neck even in death: "But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday." Coetzee, *Foe* 157. My discussion here is about the former, formal and authorial, problem, and not the latter, traumatic and somatic, one.

<sup>88</sup> Malek Alloula argues that the veil in the colonial postcards works "to recall, in individualized fashion, the closure of private space. It signifies an injunction of no trespassing upon this space, and it extends it to another space, the one in which the photographer is to be found: public space." (13) Colonial photographers use marginalized women, in front of studio backdrops for their photographs, a move which replaces the woman of the harem with the woman in prostitution and transforms the space of domestic seclusion into

the novel, the photograph “must be essentially associated with the moment in time at which it came into existence.” (Kracauer 428) It “presents a spatial continuum” for which historicism “seeks to provide the temporal continuum.” (Kracauer 425) Consequently, the photograph can purport to represent the “colonial harem” without being ensnared in problems of the simultaneity and continuity.<sup>89</sup>

As the popularity of the harem postcard attests, the trope of “female incarceration” is utilized as “a regulative psychobiography ... within various patriarchal forms under British colonialism.” (Grewal 5-6) The fiction of Sorabji, however, attests to the instabilities within this regulative psychobiography, for purdah figures both spatial and temporal immobility. The zenana is both in the periphery and in pre-modernity, and any narrative arc available must grapple with its anachronicity. Consequently, even with an imperial writer like Flora Annie Steel, the trope of purdah can provide not plot proper but only an “Indian Scene.” In a collection published posthumously in 1934, Steel’s daughter Mabel Webster includes a late story by Steel based around, as it were, purdah, emphasizing this story and its theme as part of “One special point [that] should

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that of commercial sex. The conjunction of visual denial and spatial inaccessibility leads, finally, to a (false) equivalence between imprisonment and veiling, producing the phantasm of the harem. By saturating the images of Algerian women with the imperatives of sexual desire, “the imprisonment of women becomes the equivalent of sexual frustration.” (25) In Alloula’s analysis, this problematic move is, for that genre, immensely popular and productive. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>89</sup> Paul de Man has argued that the novel “is caught with the truly perverse assignment of using both the narrative duration of the diachronic allegory and the instantaneity of the narrative present.” I would extend this more generally to talk about the ways in which 20<sup>th</sup> century narration, particularly when episodic – many of the shorter pieces of Sorabji’s fiction end up in the novelistic memoir *India Calling* – runs into some of the same difficulties. See de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” 226.

be noted": "No man can know the intimate life of the Indian peoples, he cannot even enter the heart of India—the women's quarters—much less gain the confidence and affection of their inmates." (Webster 9-10) Webster's emphasis on the zenana as the site of knowledge produces immediate significance for the project of women's writing, in this case for the purposes of empire. The question of women's writing, its importance and its necessity, is here resolved without any appeal to feminist imperatives or humanist experiential ones. When writing "by, for, and about" women is as much a colonial enterprise as a nationalist one, the domain of contestation within which writing by, for, and about women is produced is not delimited enough to be automatically asserted as "feminist" terrain. Under such circumstances, even an interest in women's writing may not be related to feminism at all.<sup>90</sup> Consequently, I would argue, the significance of women's writing in this context lies not in its mere existence, but in its formal and figural effects; not in what it tells us about the experiences, thoughts, and reading practices of women, but for the ways in which it gestures towards gendered restrictions and assumptions in literary and cultural spheres.

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<sup>90</sup> The palatability of a certain kind of women's writing to stridently patriarchal imaginaries of empire, as in the Anglophone imaginary of the period under consideration, troubles premises such as that which undergirds the very first line of the preface to the monumental Women Writing in India project: "We began work on these volumes with the premise that critical assumptions, historical circumstance, and ideologies generally have been hostile to women's literary production and have crippled our ability to read and appreciate their work." Susie J. Tharu and K. Lalita, "Preface," Women Writing in India : 600 B.C. To the Present, eds. Susie J. Tharu and K. Lalita (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York : Distributed by Talman Co., 1991) xvii. The two-volume anthology is, in one sense, a woman-centered historiographical project, seeking to include "pieces that illuminated women's responses to historical developments and ones that gave insight into the dimensions of self-fashioning and the politics of everyday life as they affected women," and is, in my opinion, highly successful (and influential) as such. Tharu and Lalita, "Preface," xxiv.

Webster also notes early on in her introduction that her mother worked with women and children, but “Unsecluded women these, daughters of the soil.” She then apologetically explains that “Behind the purdah it was more difficult to make headway,” offering a short story in the volume, “The Reformer’s Wife,” as an example of “how difficult this was.” (8) Yet that particular story turns out to be an anecdote about political reform, not women’s enunciation, let alone emancipation. The “scene of this sketch,” Steel tells us, is “among a quaint little colony of fighting Pathans,” “beyond the reach of *babus* and barristers, patent-leather shoes and progress. Beyond the pale of civilization altogether.....” (112) The story begins with a description of the Reformer, Futteh Deen: “a dreamer of dreams, with the look in his large dark eyes which Botticelli put into the eyes of his Moses,” who “reminds one irresistibly of Christopher Columbus, or Vasco da Gama—of those, in fact, who dream of a Promised Land.” (Steel 111) He edits “a ridiculous little magazine” with his eleven friends, “Solely for the purpose of being able to send copies to their friends at Court, and show that they were in the van of progress.” (Steel 113) Forced to describe the woman “behind the purdah,” the “reformer’s wife,” Steel too resorts to verbal portraiture, yet the story remains focused on the Reformer’s political fascinations. Even when promising us “the reformer’s wife,” in that crucially intimate space of the heart of India, behind the purdah, Steel fails to describe the purdahnashin at all.



This “cramped space” of Cornelia Sorabji’s fiction signals the impossibility of entirely decoupling secrecy – the closed door of the zenana – from privacy – the closed door of Woolf’s room: a “cramped space” which, when in operation, produces women’s literature as a minor literature project. Not all women’s writing is minor literature, after all, for not all women’s writing is “cramped” in this fashion. However, understanding women’s writing as “women’s writing” within the late British Empire might require thinking about Virginia’s room and Cornelia’s zenana at once, the private space of one echoing and responding to the cramped space of the other.

### 3. From England to India, 1910-1920

In 1919 Cornelia Sorabji wrote a scathing review of Rabindranath Tagore's Ghare Baire, published in 1916. Having received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1912, Rabindranath was then enjoying both commercial and critical success, in India, in the United Kingdom, and beyond. Sorabji seems to have read the novel in its English translation, The Home and the World, and she found it objectionable, even pernicious, in its portrayal of the orthodox women for whom she lobbied and of whom she wrote.

Sorabji objects vehemently to his female protagonist, Bimala, who displays "a knowledge of the world, a coquetry and ease of association with men, which could come only of many generations of – women of the French Salon." (19) In her estimation, Bimala's affair, which constitutes the domestic plot against the novel's political backdrop, is "an intrigue, an English intrigue," entirely impossible for a woman from an orthodox Hindu background. ("Rabindra Nath Tagore" 19) After a series of quoted examples, she observes: "You cannot make a Hindu by putting a red mark on her forehead and dressing her in a saree." (20)

This inaccuracy is a criticism she levies at the domestic face of Tagore's novel more generally, yet with the impossibly progressive husband, in contrast, she finds his paradoxical character is simultaneously poetic and delightful.<sup>1</sup> (18) While

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<sup>1</sup> Nikhil, for instance, "the too easy husband, has, as a husband nothing typically Eastern about him, whatsoever." Sorabji sees in this Nikhil for Tagore "an excellent chance of quoting all his own arguments against the purdah" even though the character becomes impossible and implausible. Religiously and

acknowledging that Tagore's "book is most extraordinarily well conceived and written," she insists that it is misnamed, producing a reading practice that is necessarily pernicious. "This is not a story of the Hindu Home and the outside world. It should be called 'The Evolution of Politics in Bengal' or 'An inner history of the Swadeshi movement,' or 'A history of our own times,' or the like." (2) This "plain history of the modern Bengali Political" masquerades, however, as a novel. (4) Her objection to the historical novel is perhaps at heart an objection against literary realism:

Any novelist is of course at liberty to conceive his tales, as he will, whether along the lines of fiction or of reality. But Rabindra Nath Tagore has impeded himself by his own reputation. He is supposed to be an authority on the expression in English of the Indian mind, and of Indian life and custom: and he should have been careful not to betray his trust, by inaccurately applied phrases, or settings which do not fit the communities which he purports to describe. (3)

Pointing out the numerous inaccuracies in Tagore's depiction, Sorabji waxes indignant: "Once again the educated Indian has misled the British public. He has taken arabesques and ancient embroideries, and patching his twentieth-century mill-made garment, with these – has tried to pass it off as the product of an age-old handloom." (3-4) Whereas the discrepancies in the male characters are indicative of Tagore's own confusion as a hybrid Indian, those surrounding Indian women are perniciously

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philosophically "Nikhil is un-Hindu. He is Tagore – Tagore so well steeped in Christian and American philosophy that he is no longer capable of recognizing what is Orthodox Hindu, what Tagore, and what – neither." (15-16) Sometimes "Nikhil's tongue recovers its Eastern speech" and sometimes "he is H.G. Wells," but, overall, says Sorabji, the character is poetic and delightful. (18)

misleading. In the character of Bimala, Sorabji finds a failure of depiction which is part of a failed political agenda.<sup>2</sup>

The fact is, the writer about modern India wants to have it both ways. He wants to prove the fitness of Eastern women for the most emphatic privileges of a newly found Western equality, and he wants to give the impression that she retains nevertheless all the submissiveness and picturesqueness and “local colour” of the old, most “protected” Eastern type. It is as if some Western writer should try to depict an early Victorian much-chaperoned and crinolined lady, with her megrins and vapours and cupboards of herbs and simples, as a twentieth Century Suffragette.

No, they cannot have it both ways – even their Bimalas rebel. (23)

What is a problem of plausibility in fiction is simultaneously a problem of fantasy in politics: the impossible Bimalas of progressivist fiction are the cognitive mappings of a political agenda for Oriental femininity that can never and will never come to be. In Sorabji’s reading of Ghare Baire as “a history of our own times,” the inaccuracy is precisely a function of this presentist political history, for Bimala as impossible character figures exactly what the politics “of our own times” would promise.

Sorabji’s fiction, however, grapples not only with the real women who must be figured if not represented, but also with the real woman who writes these fictions. In the work of Rabindranath, as in the work of other great men of the period, the question of

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<sup>2</sup> Mentioning Sandip’s specific plans for exploiting women for his political ends, Sorabji suggests, “Perhaps in the pages of The Home and the World Mr. Montague and the Select Committee will find some explanation of the reason why a certain section of Indian Politicians is so keen on the women’s suffrage question.” Sorabji, Cornelia. “Rabindra Nath Tagore: the novelist as Historian of our own times.” Oct 1919. Unpublished manuscript, p. 24 of 27. MSS Eur f165/32, IOR.

real women—historical figures, sociological coordinates—is entirely obscured by the figural possibilities of women. Bimala might rebel in Sorabji's reading, but Bimala cooperates entirely in Rabindranath's fictional visions—cooperation made ever the more obvious, perhaps, by the seeming irrelevance of gender in understanding Rabindranath's transfigurations.

What Sorabji figures within this dissertation, however, is not only the question of the woman writer but also that of the woman reader. In keeping with the gendered nature of the romance genre, the texts discussed in the remainder of the dissertation strongly presuppose and predispose to one structure of identification, that is, with the major male character. Sorabji's reading of Ghare Baire signals not only the failures of Rabindranath but also her own: instead of identifying with Nikhil and Sandip, she has become distracted by the female character, Bimala.

Whether modern women or native ladies, women tend to be inscribed within modernist internationalism as narrative devices through which history, modernity, and culture are transfigured, not as narrative actants of their own. From Bimala to Kautilya, the women characters mentioned in the remainder of the dissertation are written, not as Sorabji writes of her rapidly dying female characters, but as her male interlocutors attempt to write about her. In moving from the minor Sorabji to the great men of letters, this project departs from the failed transfiguration of both gender and culture to more successful texts, ones which reify differences of gender to transfigure those of culture.

## 4. Calcutta, 1912: the Little Stop Between the Words

In my translations I timidly avoid all difficulties, which has the effect of making them smooth and thin. I know I am misrepresenting myself as a poet to the western readers. But when I began this career of falsifying my own coins I did it in play. Now I am becoming frightened of its enormity and I am willing to make a confession of my misdeeds and withdraw into my original vocation as a mere Bengali poet.

(Rabindranath Tagore, 1921)

In 1913, Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize for Literature, becoming the very first laureate from outside of Europe. Whereas his career in world literature is frequently read in terms of his interpellation as an Oriental icon, Rabindranath in historical context demands to be read as a representative of the internationalization of the Nobel Prize itself.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, while noting the iconicity of Rabindranath as a hero of national cultures in South Asia, epitomized in his authorship of both the Indian and the Bangladeshi national anthems, this chapter will consider Rabindranath as a paradoxical and foundational figure for literary internationalism, indexed in his centrality in the internationalization of the most significant of international literary prizes, the Nobel. What, moreover, are we to make of literary internationalism,

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<sup>1</sup> For Pascale Casanova, the radical departure of the Nobel Prize committee from its Eurocentric literary interests is only an illusory sort of internationalism, because Rabindranath's nomination and reception had already been moderated by a European literary metropole, London. "The presence among the laureates on the eve of the First World War of an author from a colonized country would appear to be a clear sign of great daring and extraordinary independence of mind on the part of the Swedish Academy, were it not for the fact that this unexpected honor was actually the result of ingrained prejudice reinforced by colonial narcissism. Tagore had not been recommended to the committee by a fellow Indian; instead he was proposed by a member of the Royal Society of Literature in London, solely on the basis of an English version of the *Gitanjali* (partially translated by Tagore himself)." Casanova and DeBevoise, *The World Republic of Letters* 150.

particularly in the modernist moment, when we consider that the text which launched his career was not a translation of Bengali poetry but a dramatic mistranslation instead?

First published by the India Society London on 1 November 1912, Gitanjali was ostensibly the English version of a volume of Rabindranath's poetry by the same name. The correlations between the English Gitanjali, and the Bengali Gitanjali which Rabindranath claimed to be translating, however, are less than clear. There are 103 poems in the English collection, and 107 in the Bengali text; many of the English poems would be more easily identified with Bengali counterparts in three other Tagore collections, *Naivedya*, *Kheya*, and *Gitimalya*. The translations themselves are scandalously different from their source material, whatever the presumed origin. Utterly transfigured in tone and content, and with radically different structure and syntax, these poems are translated but with various parts simply disregarded, and other things added in. They are, quite recognizably, operating within a particular strain of the Anglophone poetry tradition, but they carry with them the claim, always, of being (simply) a translation of the Bengali. Operating, in that cultural moment, as a metonymic condensation of all that India and Indians had to offer, Rabindranath and his poems were seen as exemplarily Indian as they percolated through the spaces of modernist internationalism and world

literature. These poems are not quite translations, but they are not unrelated to their ostensible source, either.<sup>2</sup>

Rabindranath, with his deep and historic commitment to Bengali, did not claim his Anglophone poems as being written in English: "That I cannot write English is such a patent fact, that I never had even the vanity to feel ashamed of it. ... Perhaps you think that by now I have gotten over that delusion, but in no way am I deluded that I have composed in English." (letter to Indira Devi, May 6, 1913). Yet if Tagore was not composing in English, and he was not faithfully translating either, in what idiom exactly was he composing? Dipesh Chakrabarty has spoken of the hint of scandal, of the shocking, present in every translation, which is engendered in the roughness and discrepancy between the language of the source text and that of its translation – and hence predicated, he tells us, upon "a relationship of intimacy to both languages." (Chakrabarty Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference 286) Yet the scandal of the English Gitanjali lies not in rough discrepancies but rather in an excessive consistency, in the "smooth and thin" nature of his translations. The scandal, thus, is in the performance of generic transfer but not linguistic translation: in Tagore's composing in the idiom of English poetry while refusing to compose in

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<sup>2</sup> For a thorough if somewhat dated overview of the translation issues in Gitanjali, as well as the reception of the volume in the West, see Nabaneeta Sen, "The "Foreign Reincarnation" Of Rabindranath Tagore," The Journal of Asian Studies 25.2 (1966). Sen unfortunately does not consider the reception and reading of the English Tagore by his Indian contemporaries, for which biographical and historical materials are often the only source; see generally Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, Rabindranath Tagore : The Myriad-Minded Man, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).



English. This is Tagore's willingness, as stated in the epigraph to this chapter, to falsify his own coins, and to do so ostensibly "in play." The English Gitanjali, importantly, did not only make his career in the Anglophone metropole. It also shaped how Rabindranath was read and understood in his own India: many of his fellow anticolonial visionaries, including, for instance, Nehru and Gandhi, did not know Bengali and were reading his work in English. As Amit Chaudhuri has argued, whereas "the language of the English Gitanjali is, to say the least, problematic,"<sup>3</sup> it is "a genuine instance, albeit only a partially successful one, of an Indian bilingual sensibility expressing itself in the English language."<sup>4</sup> (A. Chaudhuri "The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore" 106, 08) Through a discussion of Rabindranath's work within the frame of modernist internationalism, I will argue that Rabindranath's rampant mistranslation into English of his own poetry provides a means of thinking about situations in which mistranslation might be a productive failure of intercultural understanding: a potentially useful response to what Derrida termed "the monolingualism of the other." Mistranslation, particularly when paired with the interference germane to bilingualism as a linguistic

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<sup>3</sup> Chaudhuri points out how whereas earlier Indian poets in English (Derozio, the Dutt family) showed "the influence of both literary models from the English canon and British Orientalist poetry, a poetry often inflected with Persian motifs, and sometimes incorporating historical material." (106) Tagore's "prose-poems," in contrast, are "ahistorical and more fluid in form and intent." Amit Chaudhuri, "The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore," A History of Indian Literature in English, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 107-8.

<sup>4</sup> As Chaudhuri explains, "for a sequence of poems that had gained such popularity, the English Gitanjali says alarmingly little and keeps drawing attention to its textuality and its unresolved linguistic tensions. Firstly, to the fact of its being composed in English, without the poet having observed the proprieties or niceties of the English literary tradition; secondly, by constantly referring, through a series of repetitions, to the presence of another language and thereby, to the pressure of another culture and way of life." Chaudhuri, "The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore," 107-8.

practice, offers both a paradigm for the study of Rabindranath's corpus and a useful rubric for literary internationalism.

The narrative constructed and revealed by this dissertation, moreover, is that of the translation and mistranslation of older forms of writing, and particularly the romance, into a modernist aesthetic. Yet whereas Rabindranath's mobilization of the romance form within his Bengali prose can be contextualized within the generalized impetus for the modernization of the Bengali language, his mobilization within the Anglophone world invokes a different sort of romance altogether. The mistranslations *by* Rabindranath, and the mistranslations *of* Rabindranath, operate within European modernism's search for a new Western idiom. Modernism in this sense embraces internationalism precisely because other cultural materials can be translated and mistranslated into the claim of novelty through which modernism proceeds. Ezra Pound, consequently, celebrates Rabindranath's work because it operates within a different sort of modern sphere, one within which has not been substantively transformed by technological modernization. "Superficially," says Pound, Bengal "would seem to be beset with phonographs and railways," but underneath such trappings of modernity one can find "a culture not wholly unlike that of twelfth-century Provence." (Pound 571) Just as looking under the Indian Railways enables Pound to find Provence, so too he reads "beneath and about" all of Rabindranath's writings to

find “this spirit of curious quiet” and a historical return which translates into civilizational hope:

“We have found our new Greece, suddenly. As the sense of balance came back upon Europe in the days before the Renaissance, so it seems to me does this sense of a saner stillness come now to us in the midst of our clangour of mechanisms.” (Pound 573)

While Ezra Pound and his European colleagues are essential for comprehending the historical tale and international frame, they are not, I would argue, useful for apprehending the modernism and the aesthetics of Rabindranath’s literary project. Rabindranath’s association with modernism is usually read in this fashion, often starting with his famous exchanges with William Butler Yeats. Such readings usually consider the Orientalist fetishization and then dismissal of his work, and attempt to situate Rabindranath’s English poetry within the aesthetic framework associated with European modernism. Rabindranath wrote, however, for audiences beyond Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats, and to begin with their readings and preoccupations is to marginalize other concerns, whether those of his subcontinental contemporaries or of our own scholarly moment. Instead of starting from the Rabindranath of internationalist modernism, the Anglophone Tagore, I want to start with that of Bengali modernism, the Banglaphone Rabindranath, and work back to the European metropole. Reading Rabindranath through modernization and the claims of modernity leads us, not to the question of primitivism in European modernism, but to a properly subcontinental modernism, an aesthetic practice which responds differently to crises similar to those felt acutely by the

European modernists. This is, finally, a modernism which resonates but is not identical with the European modernism with which Rabindranath engages.

Modernism as I will use it here refers first to a fairly well known internationalist practice which finds its center in some canonical European figures, and second to the aesthetic properties ascribed to this movement. Modernity, in contrast, refers to an evaluative and aspirational category, drawing on Fredric Jameson's assertion that "Modernity is not a concept but rather a narrative category," whose account is provided by the narrating of "situations of modernity." (Jameson *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* 94) The claim of modernity generates a sort of excited charge – because of its associations with a radical rupture, with for the first time, and with positive connotations of rationality and progress – and it is this horizon to which various South Asian languages tend, particularly in the late nineteenth century. Epitomized in the grammars and texts of Fort William College in Kolkata, the modernization of language is a foundational part of modernity in the subcontinent, extending well into the early twentieth century moment we associate with modernism proper. Consequently, I would argue, any discussion of modernism in South Asia necessitates an attentiveness not only to literature and literary language but to language as such, language as the space of modernization's radical innovations as much as modernism's more aestheticist ones.

Modern Bengali was molded not only through its emulation of modern English but also its incorporation of classical Sanskrit. The formalization of literary Bengali, of course, did not mark the end of linguistic and generic experimentation, an emergence at the margins of cultural contact within which Rabindranath's fiction forms an important milestone.<sup>5</sup> In Ranajit Guha's influential historiography, Bangla as *matribhasha* had become not just a sentiment but an ideology by the middle of the nineteenth century, undergirded by the publication of not only the first modern novel (Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Anandamath, 1865) but also the first modern histories (Fort William College, 1801-08) in that language.<sup>6</sup> This emergence, notably, was heavily informed not only by translation but also translingual competition. Rammohun Roy's translations of the Vedanta into Bangla (from Sanskrit) showed the power of Bengali for Hindus, just as missionaries' translations into Bangla worked for Christians. Bangla as *matribhasha*, emerging amongst a multilingual elite, was an ideology that hoped to emulate English

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<sup>5</sup> Partha Chatterjee for instance has argued that as the formal conventions solidified, Bengali novelists frequently "shifted from the disciplined forms of authorial prose to the direct recording of living speech." Concludes Chatterjee: "Having created a modern prose language in the fashion of the approved modular forms, the *literati*, in its search for artistic truthfulness, apparently found it necessary to escape as often as possible the rigidities of that prose." Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments 8.

<sup>6</sup> In the nineteenth century, "Bangla was beginning to be recognized by its educated middle-class speakers as an index of their identity and trusted to represent truthfully that vital dimension of their existence which constituted the Indian past. A language-consciousness was allowed thus to stand in for self-consciousness so that by the end of the 1840s a sentiment about *matribhasha* had already crystallized into an ideology." Ranajit Guha, Dominance without Hegemony (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997) 188.

and thereby to exceed it.<sup>7</sup> This language, whether referred to as Bengalee, Bengali, or Bangla, became itself a domain of contestation, torn between the “heavily stylized diction and syntax – sonorous and formal” of Sanskrit and the “relatively informal prose, closer to the language actually spoken by the upper classes in the urban areas,” embodied in the model of English. (Mukherjee 2)

From Bankim’s incorporations of Sanskrit syntax in his 1882 Anandamath (the first novel in Bengali, and an inspiration to countless anti-colonial revolutionaries) onwards, the question of a modern idiom is as much at stake as a modern literary form. The sadhus of Anandamath are not only the inspirational types of revolutionary Bengali movements; they are also the types to which the nativist and Hindu nationalist figures of Rabindranath’s Gora aspire. Yet whereas the texture of Anandamath, in its highly Sanksritised Bengali, evokes or suggests a hitherto-forgotten continuity and kinship in a Hindu Bengali Indian nation throughout time, the language of Gora is consistently polluted and littered with foreignness, with words of English and the phrases of the

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<sup>7</sup> The earlier “fear of English as the enemy of tradition was soon exceeded by a positive concern for the prestige and potentialities of the mother language. The point of that concern was not so much to replace English as to make Bangla emulate it.” In Guha’s account, “The initiative for emulation... came from Rammohun Roy, when by rendering the Vedanta into Bangla he demonstrated how the latter could be made to work for the popularization of Hindu theology just as the missionaries made it work for the propagation of Christianity.” This saturates modern Bangla within a religious and evangelical aspect, one which seems rather inconsistent with the widespread bilingualism that also marked its emergence among the elite:

Its dialogic situation, which forced it constantly to enter into exchanges with English, put its resources to test in every transaction wherever it took place.... Every semantic slide that occurred in such exchanges was evidence not only of what Bangla could not do, but also of what it could. For every difference which, in any instance, survived the most exacting attempt at translation, was an index of its originality: it revealed a property of the matribhasha for which no other language had an equivalent to offer. Guha, Dominance without Hegemony 188-9, 91.

West, suggesting a situation of constant, uncontrollable pollution, a nation of contamination and impurity. Modern Bengali prose, particularly after Bankim, may well have been “distinct not so much as a ‘development’ of earlier narrative forms but fundamentally by virtue of its adoption of a wholly different, that is, modern European, discursive framework” (Chatterjee The Nation and Its Fragments 52), but where and as that Bengali literature developed and articulated itself as part of a nationalist project, and particularly in relation to that ardent nationalist, Bankim, it produced this modern discursiveness *as though* it were quintessentially, inimitably, trans-epochally Indian. This is modern Bengali’s literary register, fittingly called ‘sadhubhasha’ (language of sages).<sup>8</sup>

This is not, however, the register used in Rabindranath’s Bengali writings, and it is certainly not the ideology which guides his work with English, whether in translating Gitanjali or composing his 1916-17 lectures, later published as Nationalism. Notably, within his own lifetime, the now canonical Bengali of Rabindranath was considered

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<sup>8</sup> Chatterjee importantly makes this point in a comparison between Bankim’s work and the kathamrta of Sri Ramakrishna, a contemporary of Bankim’s and a popular mystical leader among that period’s bhadrakalok. The kathamrta “combines sadhubhasha and rustic idiom of Ramakrishna, which was the language of preachers and poets in pre-colonial Bengal, and... it was able to draw upon the conceptual and rhetorical resources of a vast body of literate tradition” (52) It also contains as a long gloss by Mahendranath Gupta, a “bilingual dialogue [that] runs throughout the text, translating the terms of an Indian philosophical discourse into those of nineteenth-century European logic and metaphysics.” (53) This Western interlocution operates not only as justification but also as point of departure: “for both narrator and reader of the Kathamrta, the terrain of European thought is familiar ground—familiar, yet foreign—from which they set out to discover (or perhaps, rediscover) the terrain of the indigenous and the popular, a home from which they have been wrenched.” (53) This is quite different from Bankim, in whose work the foreign is not quite something to leave behind but rather something to build oneself up alongside, or even against: a model of nationalism that cannot simply be abjured for the realm of the mystic and the spiritual, as it can be for Ramakrishna. Consequently, “What is rational and realistic to Bankim becomes immoral worldliness to Ramakrishna; what is true devotion to Ramakrishna becomes hypocrisy to Bankim.” (72) See “The Nationalist Elite” in Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments.

unfit for instruction in schools.<sup>9</sup> To understand Gitanjali, consequently, I will turn to two of his Bengali novels from the same period, Ghare Baire ("The Home and the World," 1912), made famous by the eponymous 1984 Satyajit Ray film adaptation, and Gora (1910).<sup>10</sup> The turn to Gora in particular enables an evaluation of Rabindranath's translation choices without resorting to conjectures of authorial intention. Both Gora the novel and Gora the protagonist of that novel maneuver and manipulate discourses of authenticity and inauthenticity, of political compulsion and ethical necessity. Just two years later, I argue, the Gitanjali translation is negotiating the similar discourses with only apparently dissimilar means.<sup>11</sup> Both Ghare Baire and Gora are preoccupied, not

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<sup>9</sup> See Dutta and Robinson, Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man.

<sup>10</sup> My discussion of Rabindranath's prose and poetry together can be contrasted with the approach of Dipesh Chakrabarty, who begins by separating Rabindranath's corpus into prosaic and poetic elements. He argues that Rabindranath's engagement with "questions of political modernity" occurred through "the new prose of fiction," which was "tied to the emergence of the real and signified a realistic, objectivist engagement with the world." (155) His prose, says Chakrabarty, stands "for the familiar political desire of the modern to align the world with that which was real and rational." (153) Rabindranath's poetry, in contrast, "pictured the Bengali home/village as a place blessed with divine grace and beauty, a peaceful home for the tender Bengali heart, the golden Bengal of nationalist sentiments." (153) Rabindranath's conception of the poetic, argues Chakrabarty, aimed to take us "outside of historical time" (153), in large part because Rabindranath "did not see anything aesthetic in these experiences of middle-class urban life." (159) Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.

My work considers Rabindranath's poetry and prose together, in part because I do not automatically confer "realist" status upon the latter. For a discussion of the politics of Bengali poetry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Rosinka Chaudhuri, Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> This is to repudiate commonplace arguments which, for instance, claim that the Gitanjali translations reveal "the consequences of a translator being faithful to the TL [target language] audience in a way which ultimately undermines the quality of the translated material and proves to be immensely problematic in the sphere of interlocking cultural values, particularly when these values are part of the colonizer-colonized relationship between the First and Third Worlds." Mahasweta Sengupta, "Translation, Colonialism and Poetics: Rabindranath Tagore in Two Worlds," Translation, History, and Culture, eds. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevre (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1990) 56.

This vein of analysis seems to fundamentally misunderstand the ways in which a text like "Song Offerings" comes into being. To offer up, for instance, my own literal or commonsensical, structuralist or wonderfully post-structuralist, translation of Tagore poems, and then to contrast them to his own



only with nationalism and authenticity, but with linguistic slippage and the conditions of literary signification, which they work both to control and to indicate a surface of extraordinary cultural tension.

Gitanjali: Song Offerings has met with widespread condemnation. Within his lifetime, younger Bengali intellectuals had begun to decry his legacy: Rabindranath was repeatedly accused of a self-orientalising tendency, epitomized both in his mystical themes and in his mawkish English translations of them.<sup>12</sup> These are usually read, well into our contemporary moment, as a sign of his willingness to say whatever his Western interlocutors wanted to hear, an argument usually made on the basis of a comparison of the English and Bengali versions. In this critical model, the well-meaning post-colonial commentator produces his or her own translations, whether literal or commonsensical, whether structuralist or post-structuralist, translation of the Bengali poems, and then contrasts them to Rabindranath's own translations of his work. Such criticism relies, however, upon the authorization of one intellectual's relationship to both languages, so

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translations of those poems, would be a particularly inappropriate way of undertaking this analysis—even though it is what many well-meaning commentators now do. We are not, after all, simply talking of “source languages” and “target languages,” for “the job of the translator is not reproductive... but rather expository and applicational—the task of making something mean something to somebody.” Haun Saussy, Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China, Harvard East Asian Monographs (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2001) 31.

<sup>12</sup> As early as 1922, Dinesh Chandra Sen wrote to E. P. Thompson that “Bengal has not given Rabindranath to Europe—rather Europe has given him to the Bengalis. By praising him, European scholars praise their own gift.” Quoted in Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference 158. His longevity in the subcontinent is primarily through his Bengali works, as well as his educational and, via Satyajit Ray, narrative legacy. For a sustained account of Rabindranath Tagore's career and reception in what is now Bangladesh (once East Pakistan, and before that East Bengal), see Anisuzzaman, “Claiming and Disclaiming a Cultural Icon: Tagore in East Pakistan and Bangladesh,” University of Toronto Quarterly 77.4 (2008).

that the bilingual intellectual's role as translator into the world of Anglophone literature is preserved. If Rabindranath once served as translator and arbiter of world literature, the same position is now occupied, perhaps inadvertently, by the contemporary academic, using the very best of postcolonial theory and poststructuralist translation studies but still introducing, as Rabindranath did, the languages of the colonized world into the dominant idiom of the West.

Rabindranath was widely and persistently criticized by historicist, realist, and materialist critics, but no one seemed to doubt that he was in some way emphatically syncretic. Görg Lukács, for instance, absolutely condemns Ghare Baire, decrying it as a tedious and libelous pamphlet and Tagore as England's "intellectual agent in the struggle against the Indian freedom movement."<sup>13</sup> Yet even for Lukács, reading Tagore in translation, Tagore's great popularity came from his incorporation of Eastern idioms into Western language—or, in Lukács' words, "by stirring scraps of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita into his works amid the sluggish flow of his own tediousness."

(Görg Lukács 8) Even for his most adamant critics, Rabindranath does in fact bring together, in a single literary sensibility, the languages of East and West, making him a

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<sup>13</sup> "Tagore himself is — as imaginative writer and as thinker — a wholly insignificant figure. His creative powers are non-existent; his characters pale stereotypes; his stories threadbare and uninteresting; and his sensibility is meagre, insubstantial. He survives by stirring scraps of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita into his works amid the sluggish flow of his own tediousness — and because the contemporary German reader's instinct has become so unsure that he can no longer recognise the difference between the text and quotations. As a result these scanty leftovers from Indian philosophy do not annihilate the unworthy material which frames them; on the contrary, they give it an esoteric sanction of profundity and of wisdom from afar." Görg Lukács, "Tagore's Gandhi Novel," Essays and Reviews (London: Merlin Press, 1983).

particularly poor choice for simple understandings of translation, relying as they do on carrying meaning across between distinct tongues.

Rabindranath's use of English in Gora can illuminate his use of English when mistranslating Gitanjali. Gora certainly uses English words transliterated into Bengali, and English words in English script also appear at various moments. Both situationally and semantically specific, such translinguistic phenomena mark moments of conceptual tension and intercultural aporia. All the young male characters of the novel — Gora, Binoy, even the unsympathetic Haran and Kailash — are praised as distinctively accomplished precisely for their facility with English; when invited to perform at the Magistrate's birthday function, Binoy plans to recite a Dryden poem while Haran will recite from Paradise Lost. Yet when English, whether in script or in lexeme, actually appears in the novel, it jumps out of the page as though to mark crucial moments of tension, both within the diegesis and within our own experience of reading.

Such tensions appear immediately in the novel's first discussion of nationalism. In chapter four, Binoy's doubts lead him to interrogate Gora about his Bharatvarsha, whether it is true and clear (shotto, sposhto). Our protagonist, in an early moment of self-articulation, proudly responds that his sense of India is that of a "ship's captain" crossing the sea fearlessly in search of greater lands, ideas, gold. The irony is unmistakable, for one cannot think of a more obvious image of colonialist imaginings, of conquest and discovery as the route to national aggrandizement — for where, in India, is

the sea? Binoy then asks Gora where Gora's Bharatvarshya is, to which Gora responds by putting one hand proudly on his chest and saying, "Where my compass here, day and night, consistently points; not in your Marshman sahib's History of India." Gora's India is impermeable to Western historiography, but not to Western science. Gora is not just neo-traditionalist, neo-orthodox Hindu, he is also quintessentially a "Bankimian" modern in his understanding of "patriotism": when he proposes that his mother Anandamoyi fire her Christian maid, he suggests that they pay her a "pension."

Binoy and Gora's conversation on these weighty topics is interrupted by the entry of Gora's older brother, Mohim. Smoking a hookah and ambling about, Mohim requests they interrupt their service of country to help their brother. He comes to complain of his boss, the new boroshaheb (big boss), who is stingy with pay, with leave, and, in the first complaint of the list, calls the babus "baboons." To save his job, Mohim needs to publish a letter in the boss's praise, which he asks Gora and Binoy to write, asking them to sprinkle in "even-handed justice, never-failing generosity, kind courteousness": phrases which the text presents not only in English but also in the English alphabet. For Mohim, the gentle deceit of the British is what is called patriotism; though he knows his brother does not agree, he says that honest words must be said even about lying ones.

In this single, remarkable, passage, Rabindranath models and evokes several different forms of language contact phenomena. The boroshaheb's transfer of terms

between languages through phonetic association, from baboo to baboon, is pernicious and perhaps essentially colonial in its logic.<sup>14</sup> Mohim's speech is marked by repeated bivalent elements as well as dramatic code-switching, both situational and metaphorical; his speech is sarcastic, littered not only with these Englishisms but also with Urdu and Sanskrit. Gora and Binoy, in contrast, seem to be undergoing a thorough process of interference. The young Gora, as we are told in chapter five, is a situational code-switcher par excellence. Though he begins as an enthusiast of the Brahmo Samaj, he then learns Vedanta from a visiting sadhu. Called upon to speak in a school debate, he becomes a fiery patriot; responding to a newspaper article by a missionary critical of Hinduism, he becomes a trenchant writer in defense of all things Hindu. By the time that this debate is concluded, Gora is writing a book, Hinduism, in English of course. Gora's patriotism, dialogic in every instance of its progression, is a translingual affair, with not only semantic borrowing (including the word "patriotism") but also metaphors imported wholesale.

Whereas the outside world admires Gora for his patriotic leadership, his family does not. Mohim mocks him as "patriot-uncle" and "Harish Mukherjee<sup>15</sup> the Second" while his parents warn him away from the nationalist path. (33) Roman script shows up again in chapter ten, when Gora encounters the vicious modern Bengali on the steamer

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<sup>14</sup> Ironically this is an instance of precisely the particularly South Asian translation as barter model which Dipesh Chakrabarty advocates, celebrating instances such as the association of Ram and Rahim. See Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.

<sup>15</sup> 1824-61, a Brahmo Samaj leader and journalist who edited the *Hindu Patriot*.

boat to Tribeni. After Gora's scolding, to which he gives no response, the Englishman retreats to read a "nobhel"; the Bengali, however, has responded angrily to Gora, and he wants to continue. He picks up a paper which has fallen for the Englishman, but receives no "thanks"; he asks the cook for a chicken dish, which he doesn't have, and then complains, not only in English but in Roman script, that the "creature comforts" of this ship are lacking. English typeface returns again, later in the same chapter, when the youngest of the Baroda daughters, Leela, age ten, shows off her talents by reeling off "Twinkle twinkle little star" without pause or comprehension. Yet even as the villains of the novel shout "damn pig" (chapter 17) and other English epithets, so too the sympathetic characters, our would-be heroes, use English conventions to advance their trajectories and the novel's own. Gora's wanderings on the Grand Truck Road, for example, are undertaken with a small bundle, like an English traveler (bilayati parijatak, chapter 21). Sometimes, it seems, we cannot but live and think in the colonizing language.

A particular amount of translational and conceptual tension arises around the very genre to which this novel belongs: the romance. When the topic of love first arises in the novel, Rabindranath somewhat mischievously transliterates love as labh, the lexeme for a Bangla word meaning benefit, value, or worth. Yet as the novel proceeds it attempts to produce a defense of love—as well as pronoy, prem, bhalobhasha, and bhakti. Initially announced as a purely Western problem, since, for instance, Indian

marriage is not primarily individual but familial (161), love then becomes the affect through which the greatness of humanity and of natural wonder is revealed. (465-6) The problem of love, here, that of an affect understood as a human universal, and yet articulated in culturally specific terms as to be almost universally untranslatable, both within the diegesis and in our world of literary translation. Sujit Mukherjee, for instance, in translating Gora marks the use of “love” in Gora’s first diatribe as an “ironic” use of the English term, yet as the novel proceeds he does not translate other common cognates, such as “prem,” as love when they are used by Rabindranath to describe the sentiments between Gora and Binoy, the two male protagonists, “in order to avoid the ambiguity ‘love’ might have implied.” (Tagore, Mukherjee and Sahitya Akademi. 481, 86) Bilinguals frequently transfer morphemes for the purposes of emphasis and affective reinforcement, creating in the process a proliferation of terms.<sup>16</sup> This affective profusion is the foundation of the story, and affective elucidation, at the very end, the foundation of its universalist moral. Without this almost bewildering abundance of terms, without love, prem, prono, bhalobhasha, and bhakti, all deferring and differing from one another, Gora could resolve neither its concerns nor its narrative arc. The female protagonist, Sucharita, first experiences her romantic attraction to Gora

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<sup>16</sup> “The bilingual speaker apparently feels a need to express some categories of one system no less strongly than in the other, and transfers morphemes accordingly for purposes of reinforcement. The unilingual speaker of the recipient language, on the other hand, uncontaminated by another system, may not share the need for reinforcement. ... As a mechanism for the reinforcement of expression, the transfer of morphemes naturally flourishes where affective categories are concerned.” Uriel Weinreich, Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems (The Hague, Paris, and New York: Mouton Publishers, 1953) 33-34.

as a form of desh bhakti (devotion or love of country), and neither her patriotism nor her personal life can proceed until this affective knot has been untangled. In chapter 12, as disagreements about Paresh's household begin to trouble Gora and Binoy's love (prem) for each other, the seemingly political disruption is still one of the heart. It is the conflict in Binoy's heart (hridayer shonghaat) which makes it impossible for Binoy to refuse the tea; it is love (bhalobasha) for country which makes it impossible for Gora to accept it. Politics is, in this context, continually a politics of affect; political commitment can only be founded upon affective connection with others. Tagore, after all, dreams in his 1917 Nationalism of organic societies and not abstract nations.

Gora's engagement with love is an attempt to suture the connections between the individual and society through the novel form, but in a manner different from the usual Western solution, in which, for instance, sympathy produces citizenship and fraternal solidarity, while love produces the nuclear family unit and reproductive futurity.<sup>17</sup> Late

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<sup>17</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that romantic love can be considered "a problem in the history of democracy," insofar as the "idea of choosing one's life partner — or of love as an act of self-expression of the subject" worked against the norms of social regulation and stability enshrined in the custom of arranged marriage. (133) In his account, in contrast to the lust-focused elaborations of someone like Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar, Bankim, Rabindranath, and Saratchandra begin a new and self-conscious discussion of romantic (heterosexual) love (prem), as distinct from the problem of lust. (134) In this transition, Chakrabarty argues, "modern secular and romantic love emerged washed in the light Vaishnava doctrines of purity," so that the experience of love became permissible precisely as long as "love had been theorized as a spiritual struggle to free desire from any suggestion of physicality." Consequently, argues Chakrabarty, "The category of pabitra, tied to an idealization of kinship and the patriarchal extended family, obviated the emergence of a category such as 'sexuality' that could have mediated between the physical and physiological aspects of sexual attraction." (141) Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.



in the novel, Binoy articulates this connection as a question of dharma, from which both individual and society find their basis, and not the other way around. As a sort of ur-substance which manifests both the social and the individual, but is not reducible to either, dharma is here the conduit through which Tagore's other, radically universalist vision can be substantiated and staked. Often translated, and perhaps mistranslated, as religion, the dharma of which Binoy speaks is parallel to the affective problematic which Gora elaborates. Love here becomes an unguent which articulates not only the individuation of fictional characters, nor simply the social bonds of 1870s Bengal, but also our own position as readers of Bengali fiction in the 1910s and onwards. Our interiority as produced by reading the novel is cemented not through our knowledge of the characters' interiority but through our affective contagion by their loves.<sup>18</sup> Binoy's encounter with romantic love pushes and prods Gora's consciousness of what love of country can and should be; Gora's experience of romantic love (also for Sucharita) opens up to his experience of nature; and we, as readers, are subjected to utterly poetic, sentimental and sensational accounts of all these loves.

Uriel Weinrich has noted "the well-known tendency of affective words to lose their expressive force," creating "an onomastic low-pressure area" in which synonyms must be constantly produced, derived, or simply borrowed from other languages.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> I build here, and depart somewhat, from Miller's argument regarding "Secret Subjects, Open Secrets." See Miller, The Novel and the Police.

<sup>19</sup> "In such semantic fields as 'talking', 'beating', 'sleeping', 'tallness', or 'ugliness', there is in many languages a constant need for synonyms, an onomastic low-pressure area, as it were.

(Weinreich 58) "Love" may well be one of those low-pressure areas. In the particular context of Bengali modernity and post-colonial India, love and romance figure a particularly fraught site of anxiety and debate. The romances in Gora proceed through a series of letters, beginning with an envelope containing money, and with Binoy's name on the outside, which we witness in the very first chapter. Binoy and Lolita's entanglement develops through a series of often harsh or libelous letters, sometimes purloined, sometimes anonymous, yet never between the two of them. These are not the romantic love letters of an English nobel, but the letters decrying romantic love of a Bengali novel. In the very first chapter Binoy is smitten by Sucharita, who then sends her brother Satish to his house with an envelope. Inside the envelope, he is disappointed to discover, is no note, only money; on the outside of the envelope, however, she has written his "surname" in Roman letters, and he lovingly memorizes the letters, their shape and their order. Later in the book this question of the letter, both the inside and the outside of it, becomes more explicit. The text remarks on Gora's anguish at seeing a letter on Sucharita's desk as he is leaving after one of their early intense conversations. As the book remarks: "A letter is a very mysterious object. By displaying only the name on the outside and keeping all the contents within, it can overwhelm a man for no good reason." (383) Another modern technology, the newspaper, appears repeatedly in the

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Where synonyms are available from another language, they are gladly accepted; the cause of the lexical aggrandizement can be said to be inherent in the recipient language." Weinreich, Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems 58.

novel, and even with the particular mention of *Bongodarshan*, Bankim's nationalist periodical and a staple of the Tagore household. Yet the newspaper here seems to work towards different ends, producing mostly conflict as a tool of libel and protest. The mode of the newspaper is venal without being productive, even though the most venal of letters here proves finally to be positive in its effect.

The novel, however, is a form which finds no translation in Tagore's *Gora*; it is simply transliterated, becoming "nobhel," a term I will re-transliterate here for the purposes of my discussion. The theory of the novel may assert that the novel as genre is transcultural, even universal, and certainly the interface between Bengali and English has settled on an acceptable Bengali translation (*upanyas*). This is not, however, necessarily accepted in the scholarship on South Asian literature, or even in the "novels" themselves.<sup>20</sup> Early in the book, we are told of Binoy's affective confusion; he does not know what to do with his romantic feelings for Sucharita, for while Binoy had read more than enough "English nobhels," which treat such experiences with appropriate romance conventions, he cannot forget his training as part of a conventional Bengali *bhodro* household. (27) The nobhel's education of affect, moreover, is also a distraction

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<sup>20</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee describes the novel in India as "a genre that served a complex function in a colonial society, providing a vehicle for the emergence of political aspirations, imaginative adventure, historical reconstruction as well as a desire to document contemporary reality. The novel as well as Indian nationalism stand at the conjunction of English—which not only opened out a new literary horizon but introduced new knowledge—and the Indian languages which became the conduit for processing this knowledge to suit regional needs." (23) Mukherjee dates the beginnings of the novel in India to the 1850s, first in Bangla (*upanyas*) and Marathi (*kadambari*), then in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, and Malayalam. See Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire : Essays on Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

from real affect: as Sucharita becomes disturbed and romantically affected later in the book, she repeatedly uses books—flipping through them, attempting to read them, even sometimes reading them—to conceal her emotions. Similarly, Binoy feels that before his acquaintance with Lolita his life had been run only with books and through books. In it, but not of it, the nobhel—perhaps in particular the imperial romance—is a fantasy which serves both to shore up colonial reality and to disrupt it.

This stance on the nobhel, moreover, may relate to what Tagore is trying to achieve in this heteroglossic narrative form. The novel in Anglophone literary theory is the genre which produces simultaneously the individual and the social models to which is heir: civil society and the nation-state, to name just two. Gora, however, aims instead to depict the organicity of social behavior, and whereas Gora may be one of Rabindranath's works which adheres most closely to the formal requirements of the Anglophone novel, its aspirations are rather different.<sup>21</sup>

Gora's universal vision, similarly, flirts with the affective conventions of English romance but does not finally adhere to them. Unlike a nobhel, this one works out the proper weddings of all this characters within the first hundred pages or so: Sucharita to

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<sup>21</sup> Ashis Nandy for example has argued that "*Upanyasa*, the Bengali term for the novel, itself indicates that the novel was expected partly to serve the purposes of—and to seek legitimacy and sustenance from—the older tradition of *upakathas*, fairy-story-like narratives surviving in public memory, often as fairy tales. ... Tagore himself used [the novel] mostly as an extended short story. Once had had written his early novels—Gora being one of them—he chose to move from the prose form of a conventional novel to a poeticized form more suited to allegorical tales.... In the Indian context, one could say that he started writing contemporary *upakathas* or *puranas* rather than *upanyasas*." Ashis Nandy, The Illegitimacy of Nationalism : Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self (Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 18.

Haran, and Binoy to Shoshimukhi, per social requirement and convenience. Moreover, all four youth characters take a stance against marriage at some point in the book, only to then reverse this position. There are two marriages, but one occurs well before the end, without any of the details provided (Binoy and Lolita) while the other presumably happens well after the ending, again without our ken. Instead, then of a climactic ending of reproductive rejuvenation, the ending of this novel – which is, once again, not a nobbel—becomes that of the confession of Gora’s parentage, a climactic revelation to Gora perhaps but to no one else at all. Instead of reproductive futurity or melodramatic death we get a sort of negation into universality. Gora demands of his mother two asymmetrical questions: “Am I not his son?” and “Ma, are you not my mother?” (496) After she responds, he descends into a mode of self-reflection which the text narrates some far, but no further: “He has no mother, no father, no country, no jati, no gotra, no god. His everything is completely a ‘no.’”<sup>22</sup> (496)

Unlike the reproductive futurism and rejuvenation of the social order that one expects with the romance form, Gora provides a recursive ending, with the now-orphan Gora first going to Paresh’s house to share his story and his revelation of total freedom. He then returns home in a climactic epilogue of just half a page—climactic, however, in a very different fashion than the Anglophone novel reader might anticipate. Gora’s address to Anandamoyi is tautological and proceeds through negation: “Mother, you

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<sup>22</sup> Sujit Mukherjee’s translation: “He had no mother, no father, no country, no race, no name, no lineage, no god. All of him constituted a ‘no.’” Tagore, Mukherjee and Sahitya Akademi., Gora 471.

are my mother! ... You have no caste, no discrimination, no hate—you are the image of prosperity alone! You are my bharatvarsha!”<sup>23</sup> (403) Gora then demands that Anadamoyi summon her Christian maid to give him a glass of water: this is an inspiring moment for her, and she tears up at his sudden openness to love from all quarters. The epilogue and the novel end, finally, with Anadamoyi’s tearful statement: “Gora, now let me send for Binoy.” Not romantic love at all, then, but adoptive mother and adopted son, awaiting the arrival of another adopted family member.

These conceptual specificities and translational tensions around love finds instantiation within Gitanjali as well. Poem 63, for instance, delivers its universalist globalism through two stanzas, each ending with the couplet “durke korile nikot, bondhu, por ke korile bhai.” Yet the English switches, despite the Bangla’s use of informal address and the term “friend,” to the more formal “thou,” and it deletes the doubled form, as well as the repeated couplet, in favor of a string of complete sentences:

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.

I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides the old in the new, and that there also thou abidest.

Through birth and death, in this world or in others, wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same, the one companion of my endless life who ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.

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<sup>23</sup> Mukherjee’s translation: “Ma, you are my only mother. ... You have no caste, you do not discriminate against people, you do not hate—you are the image of benediction. You are my Bharatvarsha...” Tagore, Mukherjee and Sahitya Akademi., Gora 477.

When one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut. Oh, grant me my prayer that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the play of the many.<sup>24</sup>

This is not unlike Rabindranath's translation choices elsewhere in Gitanjali, but given the spirit of this particular poem the distortion is startling. Whereas the playful repetition of the Bengali produces an affective regime within which people near and far are surprisingly and delightfully revealed to be friends and brothers, the formal English recalls the structure of a hymn and ends with an invocation for some future moment of global brotherhood. Interestingly, his famous nationalist poem "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high," 35 in Gitanjali, is far more consistent with the form and content of the original Bengali, the structure of the repeated "where" mimicking that of the repeated "jetha" in the Bangla, and the invocation which ends the poem being duplicated in the English version.<sup>25</sup> All Orientalist mistranslations, thus, are not made equal: visions of nationalist inspiration can be translated analogously, it seems, but not globalist visions of universal friendship.

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<sup>24</sup> This poem, incidentally, is quoted approvingly in Ezra Pound's review.

<sup>25</sup> Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high  
Where knowledge is free  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
By narrow domestic walls  
Where words come out from the depth of truth  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way  
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit  
Where the mind is led forward by thee  
Into ever-widening thought and action  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Rabindranath's choice of mysticism for his international literary register, as exemplified in the poems discussed above, can be understood as a political response to the constrained space of Indian writing in English in the late colonial period. The language of the English Gitanjali needs to be considered not only in relation to other illustrious literary predecessors but also in relation to phobic contemporaries: that is, to derided forms of Indian usage of English, and in particular, the category of Baboo English. Baboo English is a kind of ludicrous English usage by the not-quite/not-white, marked by an excessive and inappropriate use of florid language, an absurd bookish scholasticism, a lack of control over puns, and other problems of connotation. Epitomized in "collections of spoof and genuine letters that make fun of colonial linguistic locutions, such as *Honoured Sir from Babujee* (1931) and *Babuji Writes Home* (1935)," this denigrated ideolect can be traced through to the present, (usually) non-derogatory, term of Hinglish.<sup>26</sup> (Aravamudan 133) It constitutes, I would argue, the backdrop against which Indian writing in English unfolds during this period: a backdrop against which the Indian subject has read so much English as to be incapable of expressing himself properly in the language. Though best exemplified in the racist writings of the late colonial period, Baboo English continues to haunt the now-familiar category of Indian Writing in English. The Satanic Verses' Saladin Chamcha, for

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<sup>26</sup> Srinivas Aravamudan groups together with "Baboo English or Cheechee English," the terms "Butler English, Bearer English, Box-Wallah English, Kitchen English, and Hinglish." For him, moreover, "Indian English is really a grapholect, staging and fictionalizing a written form that is infrequently experienced as such but hyperbolically consumed as a represented object." Aravamudan, Guru English 4, 266.



instance, is the baboo to Gibreel Farishta's guru; together, and dramatically so in their explosive global reception, they epitomize the duality of Indian uses of English when conducted in relation to a non-Indian Anglophone audience.<sup>27</sup> In Salman Rushdie's account, "Saladin Chamcha is a creature of selected discontinuities, a willing re-invention.... While Gibreel... [is] wishing to remain, for all his vicissitudes, at bottom an untranslated man." (Rushdie The Satanic Verses 427)

A paradigmatic example of the baboo stereotype can be found in Rudyard Kipling's Kim. Kipling's Huree Baboo is an accomplished imperial spy, whose English is a highly educated sort of sophistry.<sup>28</sup> The English of the lama, in contrast, is deeply flawed but simultaneously evocative of wisdom. To speak poorly is to speak wisely; or perhaps it is simply impossible to speak English both wisely and well. Kim's baboo is Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, official code name R17, is a "a hulking, obese Babu whose stockinged legs shook with fat," who has "the gait of a bogged cow" (207); to his French and Russian employers alter in the novel, he is "an oily, wet, but always smiling Bengali, talking the best of English with the vilest of phrases." (285) Ever the skillful and

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<sup>27</sup> "Chamcha's falsity of self—his secular postmodernity in fact—is what Rushdie suggests might be at bottom, the concept of 'evil'.... The diabolism of Chamcha's secular postmodernity is enabled by endless and discontinuous cultural translation, whereas Guru English's eternal varieties, present in Gibreel's multiple incarnations, stem from a certain irreducible untranslatability (or already translatedness, which results in the same outcome)." Aravamudan, Guru English 206.

<sup>28</sup> Aravamudan explains that a baboo, who is usually a bureaucrat or a teacher, "is obsequious in the extreme to his superiors, while exhibiting petty tyranny toward inferiors. Baboos speak the Indian English of the Victorian era, replete with bureaucratic legalese. The Baboo's anglophilia is demonstrated most often by his incongruous literary allusions to canonical English authors... but this anglophilia is farcically undermined by the frequency of the baboo's unconscious lapses into vernacular locutions and native references...." Aravamudan, Guru English 133.

ingratiating, assistant, the Babu nonetheless invokes both horror and envy in Westerners.<sup>29</sup> “How comes it that this man is one of us?” thought Kim.... If only, like the Babu, he could enjoy the dignity of a letter and a number - and a price upon his head!” (Kipling 209)

Hurree Baboo’s sense of “the advantages of education” consists of languages (Latin, French), literary studies (Wordsworth, Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and *Julius Ceasar*, Burke, Hare), and, above all, “the art and science of mensuration,” whose importance we have already seen in the education given to Kim.<sup>30</sup> The Babu uses a measuring aid that is an instrumentalisation of traditional religious practices, whether Hindu, Mohammedan [sic], or Christian: “To keep count of thousands of paces, Hurree Chunder's experience had shown him nothing more valuable than a rosary of eighty-one or a hundred and eight beads, for ‘it was divisible and sub-divisible into many multiples and sub-multiples.’” (Kipling 211) Hurree’s modern empire measures thousands of paces through the sacred numbers of Hinduism (108) and Islam (81). Perhaps the Babu’s

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<sup>29</sup> The Frenchman sees him as “an original,” akin to “the nightmare of a Viennese courier,” and one who “has lost his own country and has not acquired any other.” (288) For the Russian, who asserts Russia’s particular capacity to deal with Orientals, Hurree Babu “represents in little India in transition – the monstrous hybridism of East and West.” (288)

<sup>30</sup> “Was Kim going to school? Then he, an M A of Calcutta University, would explain the advantages of education. There were marks to be gained by due attention to Latin and Wordsworth's *Excursion* (all this was Greek to Kim). French, too was vital, and the best was to be picked up in Chandernagore a few miles from Calcutta. Also a man might go far, as he himself had done, by strict attention to plays called *Lear* and *Julius Ceasar*, both much in demand by examiners. *Lear* was not so full of historical allusions as *Julius Ceasar*; the book cost four annas, but could be bought second-hand in Bow Bazar for two. Still more important than Wordsworth, or the eminent authors, Burke and Hare, was the art and science of mensuration. A boy who had passed his examination in these branches - for which, by the way, there were no cram-books - could, by merely marching over a country with a compass and a level and a straight eye, carry away a picture of that country which might be sold for large sums in coined silver.” Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, ed. Edward W. Said (London: Penguin Books, 1987) 210-11.

awkwardly acquired western education, his “volleying drifts of English” (211), is so sophistic precisely because it is founded upon an inadequate refutation of tradition for modernity, and religion for reason. The Babu’s hybridity, of course, is a religion-reason fusion towards the ends of Empire; for instance, in the amulet and the costume which he gives to Kim. (229-30) For Hurree, Eastern religion and Western modernity are too comfortably compatible. They do not even seem to operate in opposition: the babu lacks the comfortably distanced respect for Indian mysticism that the westerner, whether Kim, Kipling, or their imagined readers, can be expected to have. Unlike Kim, who is respectful yet unafraid of Eastern religion, Hurree Babu belittles all religious practice, only to cower when faced with the ritual, and not liturgical, mysticism of the medium Huneefa. Like Kim with his multiplication table in English, Hurree manages his fear through his western education, “talking English to reassure himself.” (228) Whereas Kim fears for the inappropriateness of English in certain locations, Hurree Babu seems indifferent: “I am only Babu showing off my English to you. All we Babus talk English to show off.” (230)

When plied with drink by his European employers, the Babu becomes a trenchant anti-imperialist, and then, as his drunkenness progresses, something of a sentimental nativist:

He became thickly treasonous, and spoke in terms of sweeping indecency of a Government which had forced upon him a white man's education and neglected to supply him with a white man's salary. He babbled tales of oppression and wrong till the tears ran down his cheeks

for the miseries of his land. Then he staggered off, singing love-songs of Lower Bengal, and collapsed upon a wet tree-trunk. Never was so unfortunate a product of English rule in India more unhappily thrust upon aliens. (Kipling 286)

Hurree's supposed drunken sleep, however, is marked by his eavesdropping on the foreigners' conversation, using his Chandernagore French. Upon awakening, Hurree reasserts his loyalty to the British government, yet the foreigners "began to deride him and to quote past words, till step by step, with deprecating smirks, oily grins, and leers of infinite cunning, the poor Babu was beaten out of his defences and forced to speak - truth." (Kipling 286) The incessant oiliness of the Babu is duplicated here by the oscillation of a narrative whose concern with truth is always moored in a concern with identity. Without a secure identification in either culture, the Babu has no access to a true identity and, perhaps consequently, no access to truth in general. Like the code he gives Kim, Hurree can be "forced to speak - truth," but not without a gap in the words, a gap which indicates its status as not meaning per se but as code: a type of speech that requires neither reading nor listening, but deciphering.

Later, when the Babu has successfully sealed the game by misleading the Frenchman and the Russian, we get a rather different description of him: from a large, almost panoramic angle, we are shown "a Bengali, once fat and well-looking, now lean and weather-worn." (316)

Behold him, too fine-drawn to sweat, too pressed to vaunt the drugs in his little brass-bound box, ... a just man made perfect. Watch him, all Babudom laid aside, smoking at noon on a cot.... He does not

care to travel after dusk; but his days' marches – there is none to enter them in a book – would astonish folk who mock at his race. ... He dreams of Bengali Gods, University text-books of education, and the Royal Society, London, England. Next dawn the bobbing blue-and-white umbrella goes forward." (Kipling 318)

His skillful insincerity is detailed, its effectivity and utility presented for our astonishment, not for our praise. The Baboo's lying craft of empire, which culminates in his ridiculous dream, is a sort of necessary horror, each deception being marked here not by its motivations or implications but by the verbal obfuscation it involved. Now not just a cow or a bow-legged creature, he is instead a lean and effective instrument, metonymically reducible to his blue-and-white umbrella. The Babu, perhaps, is the antithesis of poetry and poetic speech, not simply because his English is foolish, sophistic, archaic, and comical, but also because he is pure metonym, pure object, pure information: too easily reducible to symbol and too incapable of the complex play of poetic language, of infinite regress between signifier and signified.

It is Hurree Baboo, however, who teaches Kim about the strategic – in J. L. Austin's terms, performative – use of language, through an imperial code which relies, importantly, neither on semantic content nor syntactic structure. The signal operates, instead, through a code of call and response: a "speech genre" in the Bakhtinian sense within which the absence, the silence, the gap and the pause, that carries meaning

along.<sup>31</sup> The code, Hurree instructs Kim, requires a conversation about tarkeean, yet “thee whole secret” consists not of the mention of tarkeean (or of jewels), but of a “little stop between the words,” one which splits the infinitive “to - look” and indicates Departmental membership and imperial spy status.<sup>32</sup>

But suppose now, I, or any one of the Department, come to you dressed quite different. ... I come as Ladakhi trader - oh, anything - and I say to you: ‘You want to buy precious stones?’ You say: ‘Do I look like a man who buys precious stones?’ Then I say: ‘Even verree poor man can buy a turquoise or tarkeean.’”

“That is kichree - vegetable curry,’ said Kim.

“Of course it is. You say: ‘Let me see the tarkeean.’ Then I say: ‘It was cooked by a woman, and perhaps it is bad for your caste.’ Then you say: “There is no caste when men go to - look for tarkeean.’ You stop a little between those words, ‘to - look.’ That is thee whole secret. The little stop before the words.” (Kipling chapter 10)

In this emphatically multilingual modernity, the key to meaning is not the words themselves, but their spacing and their timing. Kim sometimes dreams in Hindustani, though he famously seeks refuge in (the multiplication table) in English, but when it comes to maneuvering India’s multiplicities, it is not language itself, not even English,

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<sup>31</sup> See generally M. M. Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

<sup>32</sup> But suppose now, I, or any one of the Department, come to you dressed quite different. ... I come as Ladakhi trader - oh, anything - and I say to you: ‘You want to buy precious stones?’ You say: ‘Do I look like a man who buys precious stones?’ Then I say: ‘Even verree poor man can buy a turquoise or tarkeean.’”

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Kipling, *Kim* chapter 10.

but “the little stop between the words” which makes all the difference.<sup>33</sup> This is, of course, an imaginary which emphasizes the magic of representation—writing, cartography, the Lama’s word-paintings—and the slipperiness of presentation—physical appearance, spoken language. The gap between the words seems to offer a promise of accuracy, and of the discernment of authentic identity, not offered by other forms of spoken communication. To take this “little stop between the words” seriously as a speech genre, moreover, might help us to think differently about how a bilingual author would maneuver imperial discursive space.

Reading Rabindranath within modernist internationalism requires that we attend to precisely the “little stop between the words,” as well as that between colonized and colonizing languages. Understanding the gaps between idioms might be best begun with an examination of his 1913 novel, Ghare Baire, usually translated as “The Home and the World,” made famous by the 1984 Satyajit Ray adaptation of the same name. When reading Ghare Baire, the “little stop” is that between the first person accounts (“*atmakatha*”) of Sandip, Nikhilesh, and Bimala.<sup>34</sup> This is a rather obvious operation, since the work moves along in that fashion, but surprisingly neglected in much of the criticism. Ashis Nandy, for instance, has argued that the narratives of each of the three produces “no Roshomon effect” but provides “essentially the same story” in three

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<sup>33</sup> This might be interesting in concert with the ways in which Kim can be read precisely as a celebration of all things English. See for instance Ian Baucom, Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Sometimes translated as autobiography, *atmakatha* means literally soul story.

different voices, but my reading of the text suggests otherwise.<sup>35</sup> The three narratives are broken up, and when one ends the next one does not pick up exactly where the other narrator left off. Even within what appears to be a single shared language, Rabindranath's oeuvre is acutely aware of discursive and idiomatic limitations.

In the bilingual Gitanjali editions, the gap between the pages—Bengali on the left, English on the right—is immense. It is a stop between not only languages, but also between forms: Rabindranath was, in fact, translating “poems” into “prose-poems,” for almost all the features typical of poetry (for example, rhyme both internal and external, repetition of couplets and refrains) are missing in the English version. Poem 14 is a perfect example of this kind of stop-gap translation: not a scandal of lack of fit, but more appropriately a total gulf between one and the other. Whereas the Bangla consists of two similar length stanzas, with quite a bit of internal rhyme and prosodic structure, each of them ending with a couplet, the English “translation” consists of four complete sentences, each of them following upon the other. As with many of the other poems, the deletion of the repetition in the Bengali produces a more narrative poem with a clearer moral. Gone is the playful, alliterative, rhythmic suggestiveness of the Bengali poems, with their puns and twists on individual words, and their repetitions of tiny details from stanza to stanza. The “little stop” here is a loss not just in translation but also in intention: English Tagore is more moralizing than playful.

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<sup>35</sup> See “The Home and the World” in Nandy, The Illegitimacy of Nationalism : Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self 9-18.



Yet, given Rabindranath's undoubted command of the English language, why would he produce such different texts in each linguistic zone? Accepted models of cultural contact in postcolonial studies tend to assume not only the colonization of culture but also the colonization of language, a relationship in which the language of the colonized is subjugated, substituted, bastardized, or mutilated by the language of the colonizers. In such models, the colonial linguistic relation is precisely not a relation, insofar as it performs, in micro, the denied recognition that structures coloniality as a whole.<sup>36</sup> The languages of colonizer and colonized become colonizing language and colonized language; the struggle between colonized peoples is the same, in such analyses, as that between their tongues. The extensions of this are well-known and productive—from the Francophone anti-colonial, an insistence against linguistic condescension (Fanon Peau Noire, Masques Blancs); from the Anglophone anti-colonial, assertions against non-native languages (Thiong'o)—but they may misapprehend the dynamic.

Even under the starkest conditions of colonial subjugation, the bilingualism engendered through political and cultural contact is not a simple microcosm of that relation, no matter how heavily it is informed by it. As Rabindranath's corpus demonstrates, colonial bilingualism is a surface of contact, full of interference and friction. Postcolonial theorists, however, frequently ascribe to a model within which the

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<sup>36</sup> See chapter two of J. Achille Mbembe, On the Postcolony, Studies on the History of Society and Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

colony or post-colony operates as a space within which languages coexist as separate entities, relating to each other only as isomorphs of their attributed national entity. This model, consequently, ascribes to a normative ideal of bilingualism which would be an experience of linguistic simultaneity, a synchronic habitation of parallel semiotic worlds. Intellectual writing thus produces several bounded spaces of language which are nonetheless connected through each other, the bilingual intellectual serving as a conduit through which these isomorphs connect.<sup>37</sup> Then, the bilingual intellectual performs virtuoso feats of situational code-switching, (the juxtaposition within the same exchange of passages belonging to two different grammatical systems), elaborating the same concept-metaphor in several different semiotic regimes.<sup>38</sup> Such celebrations are common in debates around bilingualism; Ramachandra Guha's celebration of the bilingual intellectual in 1920s India, for instance, renders bilingualism indistinguishable from diglossia, praising intellectuals like Rabindranath and Gandhi because they can write simultaneously in English and in the language of the bazaar.<sup>39</sup> Yet this fantasy of

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<sup>37</sup> Guha's argument depends upon the continued assumption of one language corresponding to one world, so that bilingualism here still operates as aberration, even though a positive one, for the connection of discourses operating in "very separate worlds." While "the intellectual class" continues to decline in their "effective bilingualism," by which Guha means the ability to write well in bhasha, "urban India on the whole remains a multilingual universe." This operates through another divide, for whereas "peasants in the countryside" are often monolingual (here a question of what they speak, not what they write), in the cities "workers, clerks and artisans are often conversant with three or four languages."

<sup>38</sup> See generally Woolard, esp 6, 16. This definition of codeswitching is roughly glossed from Woolard's definition of conversational codeswitching, during speech, which she takes from John J. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>39</sup> For Guha this "flowering" of bilingual intellectualism has to do with the flowering of popular patriotism under congress leadership in the 1920s and 1930s. Bengal and Maharashtra offered "the most sophisticated conversations," occurring "*simultaneously* in two languages": "Here, the scholar had a real choice as to which language to use for what purpose." Guha proudly asserts: "Between 1920 and 1980, or thereabouts,

linguistic simultaneity is precisely that laid bare by Rabindranath's novel Gora, both in content and in form. If the bilingual intellectual could switch between codes and worlds without being inconsistent, if he could be thoroughly bilingual without being affected by it, then Gora's narrative would have resolved rather differently. In such a world of linguistic practice, Gora's protagonist can maintain his patriotic yet nativist self: he can learn Vedanta from the visiting sanyasi, in Bengali and Sanskrit, and write a book on Hinduism for the visiting missionary, in English, and still produce a nation which is authentic, unitary, and pure.

But the solution, however, is not a simple embrace of hybridity and mixing, for the valorization of a mixed or degraded idiom changes the content but not the terms of this debate. We might think here of Abdelkebir Khatibi's Amour Bilingue, a famous text for studies of the Maghreb in which Khatibi mixes Arabic and French. As Derrida pointed out, Khatibi's mixing of colonizing and colonized languages does not replace the monolingual aspiration – the dream of a sole ideal mode of language usage – even

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Bengali and Marathi were the only bilingual intellectual cultures in the world. The French write, think and speak exclusively in French; the English, in English. Yet in Pune and Calcutta, original works of scholarship were being written and discussed both in English and in the language of the bazaar."

For Guha, moreover, bilingualism is most useful for "the historian and the social scientist," for "he, and she, can operate simultaneously in more than one tongue. The creative writer, however, is forced to choose one language over the other. With the historian or critic, it is the message that is more important; for the novelist or poet, it is the medium. Creative writing calls for an attention to language that is *total*." Consequently, says Guha, Tagore "never wrote fiction or poetry in any language other than Bengali." His text then switches somewhat awkwardly to Conrad and Nabokov, who "likewise," when "they switched to writing in English, ... were compelled to discard their mother tongue." The choices of Conrad and Nabokov were "forced upon them by exile and migration"; in contrast, "the creative writer in mid-20th Century India" chose voluntarily the language of his works. Here Guha provides two more South Indian examples: R. K. Narayan's choice of English over Tamil, and U.R. Ananthamurthy's choice of Kannada over English.

though the ideal is no longer pure French. Khatibi's hero refuses both languages, and produces his own mixed idiom; Guha's heroes—Gandhi, Tagore, B. R. Ambedkar, and C. Gopalachari—choose both languages, and produce a sophisticated conversation in two different tongues. Khatibi's bi-langue works through bivalency, which is the “simultaneous membership of an element in more than one linguistic system,” and is akin to Bakhtin's double-voiced word; thus, Khatibi's bilingue is repeatedly switching and associating, for instance, from *mot* to *maut* to *mort*. Guha's bilingual intellectual, on the other hand, performs virtuoso feats of situational code-switching, which is the juxtaposition within the same exchange of passages belonging to two different grammatical systems; thus he keeps elaborating the same concept-metaphor in several different semiotic regimes. Like the bi-langue, however, Guha's bilingual intellectual speaks with two tongues, and he dreams of “an absolute idiom,” “a sole poem previously inaudible.” Despite the avowal of bilingualism, it is the monolingualism of the other to which Khatibi's (single) mixed idiom and Guha's (single) simultaneous conversation succumb, and which they affirm as well. (Derrida 67) Indeed, Guha's heroes, bilingual intellectuals themselves, have been fierce proponents of (Indian) monolingualism. U. R. Ananthamurthy has repeatedly lashed out against Indian writing in English,<sup>40</sup> and Gandhi was famously opposed to the use of English in India. Some

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<sup>40</sup> Amit Chaudhuri has discussed “the Kannada writer, U. R. Anantha Murthy, whom I very much admire, but whose public pronouncements... largely consist of repeated airings of the belief that the vernacular or *bhasha* writer has an immediate and organic access to his readership and community, in a way that the Anglophone Indian writer does not and, really, cannot. Yet his own finest work tells us something quite

bilingual intellectuals *do* produce the same conversation in two languages, but it is the bilingual intellectual as cultural critic (Ramachandra Guha) who performs this feat, not the bilingual intellectual as cultural producer. The fantasy of bilingualism as code-switching—frequently lauded as “a skilled and strategic performance that respects the discreteness of languages and their hard-edged boundaries, in contradistinction to the messy and aberrant chaos of interference and other interlingual phenomena”—is belied by the messiness of Gora, just as the fantasy of bilingualism as translation is belied by the disastrous choices of Gitanjali. (Woolard 6)

It is as a contact phenomenon—between languages, and not, per se, between peoples—that we should read bilingual literary production. Contact phenomena are often more distinct in theory than in practice, but bilinguals’ understandings of their own behavior have dramatic consequences for language change.<sup>41</sup> If bivalency and codeswitching can be thought of as ways of choosing both languages at once, the

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different about the location of the modern Kannada writer, and the tensions latent in the latter’s relationship to his or her readership. ... Anantha Murthy, the spokesman and propagandist for Kannada literature, and flagellant of Indian English writing, believes the *bhasha* writer belongs to an organic community; the vision of Anantha Murthy, the artist, arises compellingly from the conviction that no organic community is possible. No writer has a given and recognizable audience, except, perhaps, in our fabular reconstructions of antiquity or medieval history. A writer sooner or later has to come to terms with this, in a much more painful and thoroughgoing way than the questioner in the audience may suspect. The reader too needs to come to terms with it, if he or she is to have more than a passing interest in what literature does; for the writer not only speaks to the reader, but interrogates the unbridgeable gap between them. Any theory of reading that does not take this into account will leave itself open to question.” Amit Chaudhuri, “The East as a Career,” New Left Review 40 (2006).

<sup>41</sup> Depending on the politics of the situation of language contact, speakers tend to emphasize and deemphasize elements of linguistic transfer and pollution. Moreover, bilinguals will frequently modify a language to make it more “like itself,” usually by modifying what they understand to be its most distinctive features (relative to the other languages in operation). For more on this see, for instance, Grumperz and Wilson, 1971 on the use of Punjabi and Hindi in New Delhi.

missing item here might be the overlooked (and much maligned) practice of not choosing at all: that is, interference. Interference, in the narrow sense, is a situation of “linguistic overlap,” in which “two systems are simultaneously applied to a linguistic item.”<sup>42</sup> Interference is a particularly useful way of understanding Ghare Baire; the living room (baithakkhana) which becomes a space of both “ghare” and “baire,” “at home” and “outside,” as both Sandip the total outsider and Vimala the total insider suddenly have access to a shared overlap. The interference here is between a cultural regime of ghare and baire which allows their adulterous and disastrous passion to flourish produced not only through the doubled syntax of domestic passion and worldly fervor but also through the doubled syntax of English “ideas” (one of Sandip’s favorite words) and Bengali hospitality, as English books and art begin to infect Bimala with Sandip’s (and perhaps not Nikhil’s) idea of the “modern.”

Interference corresponds with what literary studies terms the pun, “that instant of ambiguity whereby two meanings are suspended in a single signifier and two speech communities can coincide in their language, although not in their frames of reference.” (Saussy 32) Through the layering of semiotic systems, the moment of linguistic interference produces multiple levels of meaning; when maintained throughout the temporal arc of a text, this becomes a sort of interlingual allegory. The very title of

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<sup>42</sup> Woolard takes this definition from Einar Haugen, Bilingualism in the Americas (Gainesville, FL: American Dialect Society, 1956). An earlier version of my argument here drew heavily on the foundational work of Uriel Weinreich, whose definition of interference is too broad for the contemporary discipline of linguistics and suggestively broad for my own purposes. See Weinreich, Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems.

Gitanjali, for instance, overlays post-sacred conceptions of art with older devotional models; by combining “geet” (song, music) with “anjali” (devotional offering), Rabindranath decisively and innovatively yokes Hindu ritual and the secular aesthetic. For Amit Chaudhuri, this title is a “word-mutation” which “retells, allegorically, the contradictory energies that went into the creation of that new thing, the secular and humanist thrust of the Indian Renaissance.” (A. Chaudhuri “The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore” 111) Similarly, Gora’s very title is a pun: at once the name of the protagonist, a seemingly simple reference to pallor or whiteness, and a (usually disparaging) term for white people, the title “Gora,” much like the titular character Gora, holds together a variety of communities and discursive contexts, begging to be read multiply<sup>43</sup>—that is, allegorically<sup>44</sup>. Gora the novel reflects the doubled overlay of interference not only at the level of the sentence and the image; but also at the level of genre and plot; as also at the level of characterization and scene depiction: everywhere. Generically, Gora combines the nineteenth century English novel’s larger plot and forward motion—particularly with its elaborate and detailed depiction of 1870s Bengal—with the studied monologues and debates of political and satirical theatre, for the plot keeps stalling when the characters, assembled in a scene just as on a stage, sit (or

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<sup>43</sup>The pun on Gora’s name is not overlooked, even within the novel: as Anandamoyi thinks proudly of her son, after receiving his noble letter from prison, the text exclaims, “her Gora is not any old gora!” (tar gora ki jey-shey gora!) (239).

<sup>44</sup> I take this insight from Saussy, who is in turn drawing on Maureen Quilligan, The Language of Allegory : Defining the Genre (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

stand, or pace) and literally debate each other.<sup>45</sup> It is not the most compelling of novel forms, but it is certainly compelling literature. Generically, it also doubles the syntax with the conventions of both Bengali and English romance, using both the fatalistic inclinations of the first genre and the individuated passions of the second, indeed seeming to alternate between them, hesitating and wavering in an attempt at political and narrative resolution. Much like Bankim, the romance saturated imaginary here is central to the fiction's politics, yet unlike Bankim, the romance imaginary is not only the medium of the novels' passion but also the very realm of its difficult resolution.<sup>46</sup>

Reading Gora the novel and Gora the character monolingually, as the rather poor English translations encourage, delivers simply a flat diatribe against nativist politics. Gora and Gora, thus, must be read bilingually, but what sort of bilingual reading would be appropriate? Reading them bivalently leads to a sort of transcultural universalism and universalist literary theory that entirely undermines the careful attention to both Bengali detail (for instance, the Brahma-Hindu debates) and literary inheritances (such as the wealth of literary allusions) that undergird this particular work. Reading Gora and Gora in terms of interference, however, allows us to think creatively about the negation into universality—as well as the familial but not reproductive resolution—

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<sup>45</sup> As Sujit Mukherjee explains, in commenting on his choices in translation, "While presenting a conversation, the original quite often reads like a drama text... where the speaker's name is followed by his speech. Alternatively, the author has used either *kohilo* or *bolilo*, Bangla verbs both meaning 'said,' after the speaker's name when presenting a speech." Tagore, Mukherjee and Sahitya Akademi., Gora 480.

<sup>46</sup> Bankim's novels "followed a code of love borrowed from English romantic novels, but presented their heroes and heroines within a framework of Brahminical values." Dutta and Robinson, Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man 41-2.



which Rabindranath tries to offer as he applies a doubled syntax, two different semiotic regimes of regulation, to the preoccupations of the poet-politician's world.

A bilingual text, as I am using it here, is not one which explicitly engages two distinct languages and/or requires knowledge of both to be comprehensible. Instead, the bilingual text echoes with the sounds of the absent language, which continues to inform the other, single, language in which it claims to make its meaning. Pace Derrida, it "never speaks only one language"; pace Bakhtin, we always hear "in the word, someone else's voice." Consequently, when we switch to Magistrate Brownlow's party in chapter 27, the text is emphatically bilingual not only because it includes, in Bangla script, the various English words of the Magistrate's lifestyle (missionary, evening party, entrance school) but particularly because these words float, as much performative as constative, whether or not the text has a bilingual reader. They operate not as signs whose signifiers happen to be in English, but as signifiers *of* English which also happen to be *in* English. Bilingualism here is not determined by whether these words are or are not common in standard Bangla usage—a criterion which would take us into the dictionary, or to the linguistic ethnologist. Instead, bilingualism here is in the manner in which these words signal emphatically towards a sign system not quite in operation here, but not quite outside it, either. Not, then, a dream of "a sole poem previously inaudible," as Derrida termed the fantasy of monolingual practice, but the disruption of other poems intruding upon one's own.

Thus, when Gora accosts the Magistrate, though commencing with a “good evening sir” the text begins to narrate their conversation, utterly implausibly, in Bengali. When Brownlow becomes enraged, however, his sentiments are provided in Bengali, then with a word in Roman script, separated by a dash, which ends the sentence, the paragraph, and the page. He feels that these newfangled Bengalis have cribbed a few words of outrage (buli) from the history books: “—insufferable!” (195)

Anglophone interference is usually an index of contamination in Gora, but not always. Binoy’s first lofty defense of casteism refers to “Greece’s ideas” and then relies upon an argument of national particularity. Each nation, says Binoy, desires its own sort of hero: whereas other countries want Wellington, Newton, and Rothschild, India desires the Brahmin. (122) Just as the corrupt Brahmin boss of Ghoshpara justifies his corruption by saying that “civilization is not a cheap thing” (128) so Haran criticizes Lolita’s moral rebellion by lamenting that today’s girls and boys “do not want to keep (maante) discipline” (202), and he rationalizes his continued pursuit of Sucharita with the assertion that “on principle this right (dabi) cannot be relinquished.” (268) The borders of Bangla are also where the largest questions of right and wrong, of justice and morality, are debated and established. On hearing of Gora’s arrest, Paresh delivers his measured opinion as follows: although he does not know, and perhaps other things are possible, “but what in the English language is called a crime is absolutely contrary to Gora’s nature.” (224) Abhinash’s plans for Gora’s penance ceremony (prayschitto) is for

a demonstrative palliative for the country, as a “moral effort,” in contrast to Gora’s more historical and utterly antisocial quest for purity and authentic identity. Whereas monolingualism might be the period’s nationalist aspiration, Gora’s bilingualism suggests that the most important issues can be apprehended only through the confusion of languages in contact.

If we are to subscribe to the common claim that bilingualism should and must be promoted—a claim to which I am generally sympathetic—we might attend first, or at least simultaneously, to the forms and practices which bilingualism takes.<sup>47</sup> As contact linguistics reminds us, the term covers a vast variety of practices and instances, and each instance of language contact can take slightly different forms.<sup>48</sup> My interest in producing Rabindranath Tagore as the interrogation point for this question is because he demonstrates the bounds of exactly which kinds of linguistic coexistence, and which sorts of cultural correlations, twentieth and twenty-first century intellectuals wish to champion. Attending to the reception and circulation of Rabindranath the icon, as well as that of his literary works, enables the tracing of both continuity and discontinuity from his moment of celebrity in international modernism to his recent revival in South Asian and postcolonial studies.

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<sup>47</sup> For versions of the United States-focused argument, see for example Mary Louise Pratt, “Building a New Public Idea About Language,” ADFL Summer Seminar West (California State University, Long Beach: 2002), vol. Doris Sommer, Bilingual Aesthetics : A New Sentimental Education, Public Planet Books (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>48</sup> A useful point of departure might be the essays and excerpts contained in Li Wei, ed., The Bilingualism Reader (New York and London: Routledge, 2000).

Rabindranath's reception in the Anglophone world was moderated by the English painter William Rothenstein, who passed his manuscript along to that *other* Nobel Prize laureate: William Butler Yeats. The contemporaneous theosophical movement, of which Yeats was an enthusiastic participant, framed Rabindranath in a decisive fashion. Gitanjali: Song Offerings was received as a text of eastern wisdom, of spiritual poetry, and Rabindranath himself as an eastern mystic more than a poet: someone who brought timeless wisdom to the west, and, better yet, in a reasonably short and easily consumable form.

Yeats' short introduction to the English Gitanjali, written in September 1912, commences with a reported exchange with "a distinguished Bengali doctor of medicine." (Yeats 261) Yeats' address to this doctor is remarkable: "I know no German, yet if a translation of a German poet had moved me, I would go to the British Museum and find books in English that would tell me something of his life, and of the history of his thought. "But though these prose translations from Rabindranath Tagore have stirred my blood..., I shall not know anything of his life, and of the movements of thought that have made them possible, if some Indian traveler will not tell me." (261) The British Museum can ground Yeats' appreciation of European literature, even in unknown languages, but the institution has not accumulated enough on India for his aesthetic stirrings to be fulfilled. Instead of the circulation of "books in English," Yeats must rely upon the peregrinations of travelling Indians.

Yeats' "distinguished Bengali doctor" immediately obliges; he himself reads Rabindranath every day. Yeats asks if Rabindranath is akin to the Petrarch or Dante of a "new Renaissance"; his interlocutor assures him that Rabindranath's talent is singular: "we call this the epoch of Rabindranath." (261) Through this nameless Bengali interlocutor, Yeats' introduction tells us of the greatness of Tagore's family and their marvelous inheritance of culture.<sup>49</sup> For Yeats, whose discussion of the poems is here thematic and figural, not at all stylistic or formal, the appeal of Gitanjali lies in its estranged universalism: "A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image, ... or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream." (Yeats 265) This familiar strange seems to have particularly troubled postcolonial studies commentators; "unable to appreciate the Bengali poet as intellectually and politically a fully mature and autonomous individual" (Jelnikar 1005), Yeats reduced "Tagore's voice" to "Yeats' own echo," "sustain[ing] a modernist economy that is able to assimilate others but unable to

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<sup>49</sup> The most frequently discussed portion of this introduction is the passage, in the second section, where Yeats begins to speak about himself. "I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. These lyrics – which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention, display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and the noble." W. B. Yeats, "Introduction," Gitanjali, Song Offerings : A Collection of Prose Translations Made by the Author from the Original Bengali Manuscript, eds. Rabindranath Tagore and Visva-Bharati (New Delhi: Published by UBS Publishers' Distributors in association with Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, 2003) 264.

cede priority to the other.” (Singh) Yeats’ celebration of Rabindranath’s familiar strange, however, cannot be separated from the modernist preoccupation with practices of aesthetic estrangement, practices in which both Yeats and Rabindranath participated, as well as, of course, modernist interests in primitivism and the occultism.<sup>50</sup> While the unequal dynamics of this site of literary cultural exchange are beyond doubt, well-meaning castigations of Yeats’ prefatory choices are unable to assess, for instance, his decision to end the preface not with his own words but with Rabindranath’s, and to mark explicitly the loss in translation of which even Yeats in 1912 is well aware.<sup>51</sup> As at the juncture of two languages, moments of inter-idiomatic contact, exemplified here between Yeats’ words and Rabindranath’s, cannot be understood simply through dominance-hegemony models, or models in which one voice is reduced to the shadow of another. Yeats remarks upon Rabindranath’s great innocence and simplicity, and ends

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<sup>50</sup> As for so many European modernists, Rabindranath’s *Gitanjali* offers Yeats an opportunity to reflect upon the possible rejuvenation of the world given the disintegrated wasteland of western civilization. “If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which — as one divines — runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verse will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads.” (264) Unlike “the East,” where they “know how to keep a family illustrious,” we in Europe “hide great and little things under the same veil of obvious comedy and half-serious deprecation.” (262) “We write long books where no page perhaps has any quality to make writing a pleasure, being confident in some general design, just as we fight and make money and fill our heads with politics — all dull things in the doing — while Mr. Tagore, like Indian civilization itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity.” (266) Yeats, “Introduction.”

<sup>51</sup> Amardeep Singh for example makes this argument within a discussion of European modernists’ practice of writing prefaces for non-European writers, even though they rarely had prefaces for their own. For Singh, Yeats’ preface for Tagore, much like E. M. Forster’s for Mulk Raj Anand or André Breton’s for Aimé Césaire, is finally an appropriative and absorptive gesture, “instituting dependency or vassalage: Yeats, we could say, uses the name ‘Tagore’ to extend the domain of his own authorship, and subsumes Tagore into his own image of a worldly modernism.” Amardeep Singh, “The Lifting and the Lifted: Prefaces to Colonial Modernist Texts,” *Wasafiri* 21.1 (2006): 3.

with poem 60 from Gitanjali, neither framed nor introduced, though set off in quotation marks.

Whereas the early twentieth century reception of Rabindranath's work in the Anglophone world tended to appraise him as a mystic, late twentieth and early twentieth century scholarship on his oeuvre works to recuperate him as a political thinker. This disjuncture is particularly remarkable given that both sets of critical responses tend to focus on his output from the 1910s, a pivotal decade not only for his standing in world literature but also for his stance towards Indian anti-colonial movements. Internationalist framings of Indian anti-colonialism were once commonplace,<sup>52</sup> but after the First World War Indian anti-colonialism took on a particularly nationalist aspect, though Rabindranath's internationalism continued and intensified throughout his lifetime. This separated him out from audiences both domestic and foreign, particularly as his views appeared to converge with the internationalist stances professed by those seeking to extend empire under another name—this is, of course, Lukács' angry accusation.<sup>53</sup> Rabindranath's withdrawal from

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<sup>52</sup> Gauri Viswanathan discusses Tagore's internationalism alongside the work of the Irish poet James Cousins, who moves to India during the home rule agitation. Her reading of Cousins, in which she identifies an interest in the Heroic Romances of Ireland (A.H. Leahy, 1905) as a vehicle for "turn[ing] mythological fantasy into national possibility" (332), is complementary to many of the issues discussed here. Cousins, however, "insisted on a pre-existing religio-racial mixture of Celt and Aryan" (336), and used a "racial imagination" to argue that "the literary revival of his time was an awakened memory of what had, in epigenetic terms, been suppressed by colonial rule." (337) See Viswanathan, "'Synthetic Visions': Internationalism and the Poetics of Decolonization."

<sup>53</sup> "Tagore's isolation, especially in India, was all the more pronounced because his stance on internationalism as the political philosophy of the future appeared to converge with that of Europeans then residing in India. Indeed, internationalism appeared to many to have been the cultural priority of European

politics after the Swadeshi movement of 1905-08, combined with his massive popularity in the imperial metropole, left him in an awkward relation to dominant political and nationalist trends. The works discussed in this chapter mark the beginnings of a painful transition: much like his protagonist Gora, Rabindranath's dream of universalism becomes grounded in a practical experience of individual isolation.

Rabindranath's anti-nationalist stance, however, has become celebrated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the post-modern imperative resuscitating that which proved so unpalatable to the modern. He becomes, in these accounts, a different sort of hero: not only the national poet and the Bengali mystic, but also the one man of his time who could see beyond the nationalist agendas of his contemporaries.<sup>54</sup> Rabindranath's recent popularity within South Asian studies, consequently, is quite selective in which texts are revisited and how his internationalism is framed.<sup>55</sup> His English Nationalism (1917) is celebrated, and so is his Bengali Ghare Baire, but not his Bengali and English Gitanjali versions, even though they are all written within the same decade.

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émigrés in India who, neither sympathetic to the continuance of British colonial rule nor keen on seeing a violent takeover by extremist nationalists, favored a more spiritual successor to the inevitable demise of empire. Viswanathan, "'Synthetic Visions': Internationalism and the Poetics of Decolonization," 327.

<sup>54</sup> The most influential of these would be Ashis Nandy, The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994). For a rather simpler, and shorter, account, which celebrates his anti-nationalism specifically within a postcolonial/global and commonwealth frame, see Mohammed A. Quayum, "Tagore and Nationalism," The Journal of Commonwealth Literature 39.1 (2004).

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of the "sudden rediscovery of Tagore, that icon of the middle classes, after thirty-odd years and a lifetime devoted to the subaltern project" by intellectuals such as Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, and Gayatri Spivak, see Rosinka Chaudhuri, "*The Flute, Gerontion, and Subalternist Misreadings of Tagore*," Social Text 22.1 (2004): 104.



The praise for Nationalism in our contemporary moment is easily explicable. Consisting of three lectures and entirely consistent in its use of a florid and passionate English vocabulary, Nationalism presents a fairly consistent poet-politician whose grasp of politics is emphatically eschatological—this would be, for instance, the Rabindranath Tagore which Du Bois celebrates. Nationalism operates through a separation between nationalism, which associates with science, rationality, power, and efficiency; and society, which he associates with truth, spirituality, perfection, and reality, and with human existence in its natural form.<sup>56</sup> This distinction enables him to simply accept the jeers directed towards a “defeated people”; for Rabindranath, only defeat on the political and temporal stage can make possible reality on the spiritual and societal plane.<sup>57</sup> In modernity, man’s “mental and material power” has outgrown his “moral strength,” making him like “an exaggerated giraffe” —and “his heart is suffering from want of blood.” (“Nationalism in the West” 49) Knowledge and efficiency are “the servants of man, not the man himself,” akin to “the service in a hotel” which, while elaborate, “is more convenient than hospitable.” (“Nationalism in the West” 55)

Rabindranath attributes all of Europe’s greatness to the medieval period, during which “the simple and the natural man, with all his violent passions and desires, was

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<sup>56</sup> “Man in his fullness is not powerful, but perfect.” It is only through artificial fragmentation that men become powerful: “Turn a tree into a log and it will burn for you, but it will never bear living flowers and fruit.” Rabindranath Tagore, “Nationalism in the West,” Nationalism (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917) 50-1.

<sup>57</sup> Tagore says that the Japanese newspapers praised his utterances “for their poetical qualities while adding with a leer that it was the poetry of a defeated people. I felt they were right.” Tagore, “Nationalism in the West.”<sup>53</sup>

engaged in trying to find out a reconciliation in the conflict between the flesh and the spirit." ("Nationalism in the West" 46-7) The period which came after, "the age of intellect, of science," is one which Rabindranath finds much less useful. Intellect is an "ascetic... who only reasons," which can derive "the roots of things" precisely because of its lack of concern with "the thing itself," like a grammarian who wades through poetry unaffected, seeking only the laws of words and not the substance or meaning thereof.<sup>58</sup> What is lost, however, in this search for law, and hence power and mastery, is reality, which he defines as "the harmony which gives to the component parts of a thing the equilibrium of the whole." ("Nationalism in the West" 48) It is reality itself that can be attained through the corporeal, and not the intellectual: Nationalism's program is not only poetic but also affective in its import.

Nationalism, however, is not a monolingual text, and the material contained within it is not originally intended for solitary and private reading. The genre here is three distinct lectures, delivered in three different venues to three different audiences. To read Nationalism without attending to reception is to misapprehend the genre, producing a historical icon whose utility lies precisely in a new sort of transhistorical mysticism. In Amartya Sen's account of "Tagore and His India," for instance, a

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<sup>58</sup> "Our intellect is an ascetic who wears no clothes, takes no food, knows no sleep, has no wishes, feels no love or hatred or pity for human limitations, who only reasons, unmoved through the vicissitudes of life. It burrows to the roots of things, because it has no personal concern with the thing itself. The grammarian walks straight through all poetry and goes to the root of words without obstruction. Because he is not seeking reality, but law. When he finds the law, he is able to teach people how to master words. This is a power,—the power which fulfills some special usefulness, some particular need of man." Tagore, "Nationalism in the West."47-8

historically grounded discussion of Rabindranath soon gives way to meditations on the present, in which the great Kobi acts, one might say, as the ghost of India past: “If Tagore were to see the India of today....” Despite Sen’s careful attention to what he calls “the Gandhi-Tagore debates” —not debates at all, but disagreements between Gandhi and Rabindranath which he culls from a variety of sources in various points of their acquaintance—Sen’s Rabindranath, whose ambiguity he celebrates, is capacious and accommodating, not historically specific or delimited.<sup>59</sup>

Belonging to both semiotic regimes, pointing in both directions, Rabindranath the bivalent poet-politician works as currency in both English and Bengali, yet while this may have been true in 1912, it was certainly no longer true after the cusp of that particular literary-political moment. To read Rabindranath as a bivalent bilingual, thus, produces a suggestively but perhaps impossibly large cultural icon, whose mythic worldliness cannot be substantiated through the specificity, detail, and particularity of each of his literary texts. Rabindranath Tagore, poet-politician, is instead a locus of interference: with his dramatic white beard, sweeping robes, and brilliant command, if not use, of English, Rabindranath and his corpus are a space where not all elements belong to two different systems at once, nor work in parallel in each of them, but instead where each element has a doubled pressure placed upon it, the regimes of meaning and semiotic convention imposed and utilized in the Anglophone world, on the one hand,

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<sup>59</sup> For Sen, “That Mahatma Gandhi has received incomparably more attention outside India and also within much of India itself makes it important to understand ‘Tagore’s side’ of the Gandhi-Tagore debates.” Amartya Sen, “Tagore and His India,” *New York Review of Books* (1997).

and those utilized and demanded in the Banglaphone world, on the other. To read Rabindranath, we must read for the little stops between the words: for performative and not constative linguistic elements which are perhaps not prior to regimes of signification but constitutive of them. Script choices, as well as silences, are one of these basic examples, as are the moments of awkwardness when one of Rabindranath's works tries to jump from one set of generic conventions and demands to another.

For Rabindranath himself, writing about his U.S. experiences, he was a representative of all Asiatic peoples, a metonymic condensation of everything fascinating the Orient had to offer.<sup>60</sup> Yet I want to suggest that a certain variety of fraudulence — what we might today call “performativity” — was an intentional and significant component of his life and oeuvre. Rabindranath's first poetry is inspired by *the story of*, and not the poetry of, Chatterton, the eighteenth century boy poet who published his own writing as that of a 15<sup>th</sup> century monk, Thomas Rowley. Chatterton's genius, penury, and early death were a great inspiration for the English Romantics; on Rabindranath, however, it was the fraudulent literary history that had the greater effect.

<sup>61</sup> The 12 or 13 year old Rabindranath, having recently read the Vaishnav poets Chandidas and Vidyapati, produced the *Bhanusingher Padabali*, a feat of literary fraud and impersonation in which he “attempted to capture, in Brajbasha, something of the music of those older texts, and also to emulate Chatterton's feat of reimagining

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<sup>60</sup> For more on this note see the section entitled “From India to the United States, 1920-1930.”

<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, Wordsworth's “Resolution and Independence”; Keats' “Sonnet to Chatterton”; or Coleridge's “A Monody on the Death of Chatterton.”

tradition." (A. Chaudhuri "The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore" 105)

Published in the family magazine *Bharati*, Rabindranath was delighted when a Ph.D. thesis in Germany included Bhanu Singh as part of the lyric poetry of Bengal, citing him as a particularly inspiring example of the kind of poetry that could no longer be written in today's degenerate subcontinent.<sup>62</sup> That other literary giant, Bankimchandra Chatterji, may have set out, with the other historians of the period, to write a Bengali history of *bharatvarshya* based on English models of historical periodisation. Rabindranath, in contrast, set out to perpetuate a Bengali version of a romantic English fraud, to falsify the valorization of the past in a manner only discovered, in the context he was imitating, after the poet's death.

It is this comfort with fraudulence that both demands a closer look at Rabindranath, both icon and archive, and a more skeptical relation to him. Rabindranath may have been widely and persistently criticized, even condemned, by his more historicist, realist, or materialist-minded critics, but perhaps his failure to accurately figure the real indicates not a refusal to engage, but a transfigurative relationship to it. The Indian intellectual of 1912 is caught in an unenviable predicament: to know English or Anglophone culture too well is to be a Babu, and to have his authenticity or at least his sincerity questioned. Rabindranath negotiates this bind both through the form of his fiction and through the content of the fictional worlds he narrates. For example, whereas

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<sup>62</sup> For a short account of this story see Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, "Introduction," *Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology*, eds. Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (London: Picador, 1997) 12. For the exhaustive biography, see Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore : The Myriad-Minded Man*.

Kipling's tragicomic Hurree Babu reads Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Burke, and Hare, Rabindranath's laudable Paresh Babu reads Andrew Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Paresh's sitting room, described carefully for us early in the novel, contains a colored picture of Jesus on one wall and a photo of Keshab Chandra Sen on the other, along with several newspapers, a book by Theodore Parker, and a globe covered with a cloth. The novel's favored heroine, Sucharita, reads *Imitatio Christi*. Within Gora, as within Rabindranath's life, Indian intellectuals demonstrate their true erudition not through book learning but through spiritual elucidation/enlightenment. In the Gitanjali translations, similarly, Rabindranath emphatically rejects any sort of scholasticism or even any literary allusions, features frequently parodied in caricatures of baboos. Whereas earlier Indian poets in English, from Henry Derozio to Toru Dutt, showed "the influence of both literary models from the English cannon and British Orientalist poetry, a poetry often inflected with Persian motifs, and sometimes incorporating historical material," the English Gitanjali, in contrast, contains "prose-poems" that are "ahistorical and more fluid in form and intent." (A. Chaudhuri "The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore" 106-8) This apparent ahistoricism, much like that of the English Romantics he so admired, is a historical and political stance, and not simply an escapism.<sup>63</sup> Framing poetry as "a powerful arbitrator in matters of political modernity,"

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<sup>63</sup> Chaudhuri for instance notes that "a substantial part of Tagore's 'Eastern' mysticism was actually quite Western and Victorian in its thrust, involving a sharp Ruskin-like critique of utilitarian values, and a valorizing of the autonomy and sanctity of the work of art." Chaudhuri, "The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore," 107.

well into the mid-twentieth century, and as part of a “search for a new, modern idiom with which to articulate the nation” enables us to discuss Tagore’s emphatically mystical poetry within the properly political context to which it responds and within which it operates. (R. Chaudhuri "*The Flute, Gerontion, and Subalternist Misreadings of Tagore*" 114)

Yet Rabindranath avoids the category of the baboo only to fall into another stereotype, that of the Guru. “Guru English,” in Srinivas Aravamudan’s formulation, is a variety of Indian English which can be seen as a unifying continuum through much of the late nineteenth to the present, uniting certain conceptions of Indian-origin spirituality with particular demands placed upon Indian-origin subjects.<sup>64</sup> “The bluster of the guru is that of a fraudulent super-baboo.” (Aravamudan 135) “Rather than apologizing for cultural bastardy and hybridity as baboos do, gurus perform their intercultural mimesis with impunity.” (Aravamudan 134) Finally, he tells us, “Guru English derives its paradoxical power precisely from its referential inadequacy. Unable to refer adequately, it can conjure excessively.” (Aravamudan 266-7) But reading Rabindranath, of course, is not at all like reading, for instance, Rajneesh Osho or Deepak Chopra, or even his contemporary, Aurobindo Ghose. Rabindranath is a mystic only in

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<sup>64</sup> In Srinivas Aravamudan’s theorization of Guru English, a guru like Gibreel Farishta is created not simply through the transportation to the U.K. of “an untranslated man,” but instead through a complex of conditions of both enunciation and reception, within which the Indian speaker of English is, as it were, both speaking and spoken. Guru English, accordingly, operates as a sort of “commodifiable cosmopolitanism” (5), a “a form of domesticated xenotopia within the West and beyond” (18), and it “represents a transcommunal phantasm of global interactivity without a strong sociological basis—or doctrinal core—to underpin its claims.” Aravamudan, *Guru English* 30.

English, rarely read as a spiritual guide in his more frequently used Bengali. His mysticism, consequently, is more accurately located within the confused abreactions to his cultural hybridity, than in the writings or the historical figure. As Ezra Pound confessed, "When I leave Mr. Tagore I feel exactly as if I were a barbarian clothed in skins, and carrying a stone war-club, the kind, that is, where the stone is bound into a crotched stick with thongs." (Pound 575) With neither skins nor clubs in his baggage, Rabindranath's mysticism is a discursive effect produced as much around the subject as by the subject to which it attaches.

The transfigurative internationalism of Rabindranath's work, moreover, might be most obvious in its espousal of not only language but also music. His international interlocutors seem particularly struck by the musical nature of Gitanjali's "song offerings": Yeats gushes that, "like Chaucer's forerunners," Tagore "writes music for his words," while his Japanese translator, Suko Wantanabe, emphasizes in his introduction that "Gitanjali should be recited, sung." (Tagore and Visva-Bharati 286) Rabindranath's musical works famously combined Bengali and English musical conventions to produce a corpus as syncretic as it was, finally, linguistically, Bengali. To apprehend the transfigurative syncretism of his prose and poetry, we might accordingly attend to the sound of these writings, not only through the question of phonemes but through those of prosody. Ezra Pound, with his peculiar passion for formalism in poetry, discusses both Bengali and English versions of Gitanjali with detailed technicality, describing the



rhyme scheme, mentioning particular rhyming pairs, and even explaining the meter of Bengali poetry: “not quantitative as in the Greek or Sanscrit [sic] measures, but the length of syllables is considered, and the musical time of the bars is even.” (Pound 578) For Pound, however, this careful study of another culture is finally towards, not simply the rejuvenation of Europe, but in the service of a greater good yet to be discovered or invented. As he remarks:

In fact, this older language has already found that sort of metric which we awhile back predicted or hoped for in English, where all the sorts of recurrence shall be weighed and balanced and co-ordinated. I do not mean to say that the ultimate English metre will be in the least like the Bengali, but it will be equally fluid and equally able to rely on various properties. We will not rhyme in four syllables; we may scarcely rhyme at all; but there will be new melodies and new modulations. 578

It is this search, for “new melodies and new modulations,” that is the transfigurative offering of Rabindranath’s musical mistranslations. The reading practice appropriate to modernist internationalism, consequently, seeks this novelty as much as the cultural materials from which it springs: not in the hopes that the translation will be “in the least” like the original, but that cultural correspondences and recurrences might be “weighed and balanced and co-ordinated.”

## 5. From India to the United States, 1920-1930

In 1929 W. E. B. Du Bois solicited a note for *The Crisis* from Rabindranath Tagore, which he included in the October 1929 "Children's Number." The note reads:

What is the greatest fact of this age? It is that the messenger has knocked at our gate and all the bars have given way. Our doors have burst open. The human races have come out of their enclosures. They have gathered together.

We have been engaged in cultivating each his own individual life, within the fenced seclusion of our racial tradition. We had neither the wisdom nor the opportunity to harmonize our growth with world tendencies. But there are no longer walls to hide us. We have at length to prove our worth to the whole world, not merely to admiring groups of our own people. We must justify our own existence. We must show, each in our own civilization, that which is universal in the heart of the unique.

Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath's note is in his own handwriting, reproduced as such with Du Bois's commentary. Du Bois's gloss begins, as usual, with biographical material; then reproduces the text of a missive from Rabindranath's secretary, Amiya C. Chakravartz [sic] which accompanied the note itself. Du Bois then provides a typeset version of the note which is reproduced, much larger, in Rabindranath's handwriting on the same page. It is as though the reader of *The Crisis* might, quite literally, not be able to read, much less understand, Rabindranath's message unless Du Bois, again quite literally, types it out for him. Rabindranath's message, in its anti-imperial anti-racist universalism, says Du Bois, "is in a language which neither white nor black Americans

can easily understand.” (334) Unless, of course, if Du Bois transcribes *and* explicates it for them.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, in this typed transcription, Du Bois writes of “the forced seclusion of our racial tradition.” The handwritten note, however, speaks of “the *fenced* seclusion of our racial tradition” (emphasis added), which is also more in keeping with Rabindranath’s usual imagery.<sup>2</sup> In this moment of transfiguration, “fenced” becomes “forced,” through an internationalist misreading that reveals even as it occludes. Whereas Rabindranath’s racial seclusions are proprietary fencings-off of colonial subjects from each other and from the colonizer, in response to a subjugated but still subject status, the proprietary impulse in Du Bois’s post-slavery context simply does not apply. In late colonial India, the fencing off of a racial tradition produces a certain race-based nationalist consciousness; Rabindranath may be thinking of the often-destructive

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<sup>1</sup> Gauri Viswanathan writes briefly of this note, saying that “even African American readers of *The Crisis*” were “rightly stunned that Tagore... should strike such a universalist note even while experiencing the most humiliating forms of racism.” Viswanathan, “Synthetic Visions”: Internationalism and the Poetics of Decolonization,” 326-7.

<sup>2</sup> Consider, for instance, the oft-quoted poem “Chitto jetha bhayshunyo”/“Where the Mind is Without Fear,” which forms poem (“verse”) 35 in the English *Gitanjali*:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action ...  
Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake.

This poem relies, particularly in the Bengali, on what he translates here as “narrow domestic walls”: the fencing off of a personal courtyard which, in the Bengali, divides up both the land *and* the sky, and hence our common cosmic destiny. Rabindranath Tagore and W. B. Yeats, *Gitanjali, Song Offerings* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1914).

attempts to lay claim to bits of tradition, which then separate out different claims to self-determination.

In the U.S., however, of the same period, racial seclusion finds an obvious and invidious articulation in racial segregation, most notably perhaps Jim Crow. Here the separating out of a racial tradition marks racism and oppression, and it does not necessarily lead to nationalist consciousness (though, of course, many have tried, but without what Du Bois would consider success).<sup>3</sup> In contrast, thus, to Rabindranath's fenced seclusions of tradition, which separate out levels of subjecthood and status, the forced racial seclusions of the U.S. demarcate boundaries between those accorded the status of subjects (white Americans) and those treated as objects (black Americans). Du Bois's mistranscription, thus, might be a necessary error.

Du Bois then tries to explain Rabindranath's message for his readership:

Many of our readers will peruse these words with a certain puzzlement. Here is a man who is colored, who writes practically nothing of what we are learning to call "race consciousness." His Message is universal. He has risen to something quite above the artificial limitations of race, color and nation. He recognizes the Messenger of Human Culture as bursting racial bonds. ... The Universal which [is] in the heart of the Individual must show itself in every civilization.

This is Tagore's message in a language which neither white nor black Americans can easily understand. White America is provincial and material to the last degree. To its little narrow mind nothing in earth, sky or sea is as big and rich and ancient as America. But we who criticize white America have also by our very criticism been forced into

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<sup>3</sup> I am thinking here foremost of Marcus Garvey, who is caricatured and criticized in Dark Princess, as well as in Du Bois's other work.

provincialism. ... This is natural, and today perhaps and in this generation, almost inescapable. (Du Bois and Tagore 334)

Du Bois then ends the gloss—and the two page feature more generally—by reprinting, in quotes, a lengthy account of how “Even Tagore himself when he came to America found his environment so narrow and discourteous that he cancelled his engagements and went home.” (Du Bois 334) This passage is from a speech that Tagore gave in Tokio [sic] on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1929, in which he narrated his harassment in America:

“The people seemed to be cultivating an attitude of suspicion and incivility toward Asiatics. I did not at all like it. I could not stay on sufferance, suffer indignities for being an Asiatic. It was not a personal grievance, but as a representative of all Asiatic peoples I could not remain under the shadow of such an insult. I took passage without delay.” (Du Bois and Tagore 334)

Tagore emphasizes his goodwill toward the American people, but says:

“I have real respect for the [American] people, but also respect for my own people, ‘colored’ people. If they must meet such treatment in that country it is best for any self-respecting Asiatic not to thrust himself upon its hospitality.” (Du Bois and Tagore 334)

Tagore concludes with the following question:

“Why does such a country treat the peoples of Asia, colored peoples, all strangers who come within her gates with open minds, in such a manner that they get such an impression as I received?”

This is also the question, in Rabindranath’s quoted voice, with which Du Bois ends the entire piece.

The shared space of English, here, does not prevent misreading or misinterpretation; in the practices of framing demanded by vast cultural and political

differences, prefatory remarks and glossing practices begin to look much like translations. The bilingual Rabindranath may reveal the complexity of linguistic contamination across the borders of languages. The monolingual Du Bois, in contrast, elucidates the diverse and sometimes chaotic possibilities of signification contained within what is ostensibly a single language, "English." The move from Rabindranath to Du Bois builds upon the dilemmas of modernization and language ideology to confront the necessary heterogeneity within any shared linguistic rubric. This move from literal mistranslation to cultural mistranslation, accordingly, shifts us across continents and cultures only to expose that one language never corresponds to only one cultural imaginary.

## 6. Chicago, 1928: the Many-Voiced Word

Ardent internationalist and progressive icon, W. E. B. Du Bois in 1929 requested a note from Gandhi<sup>1</sup> “to the American Negro,” to be included in the NAACP journal *The Crisis*.<sup>2</sup> Gandhi’s note was published in the July 1929 issue, reproduced in a facsimile of his typed version:

Let not the 12 million Negroes be ashamed of the fact that they are the grand children of ~~the~~ slaves. There is no dishonour in being slaves. There is dishonour in being slave-owners. But let us not think of honor and dishonor in connection with the past. Let us realize that the future is with those who would be truthful, pure and loving. For as the old wise men have said, truth ever is, untruth never was. Love alone binds and truth and love accrue only to the truly humble.

Sabarmati, 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1929

M.K. Gandhi

Du Bois, in commenting upon it, configured a meaning for *The Crisis* that is hardly a simple translation of Gandhi’s. His note, in much smaller, italicized print to the left of Gandhi’s big typeface, acts as both biography and pedagogy. Much shorter than that which he provides for Rabindranath Tagore later the same year, this note begins, quite literally, with “Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the greatest colored man in the world, and perhaps the greatest man in the world.” Du Bois then provides some details

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<sup>1</sup> The Library of Congress (LC) authorities list uses “Mahatma Gandhi” and not “Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi” or “M.K. Gandhi” as its subject heading; accordingly, all the sources cited here would be found listed under “Mahatma” and not “M.K.” Gandhi. Given, however, that “Mahatma,” meaning “great soul,” is an honorific given to Gandhi later in his life, I have used the “M.K. Gandhi” with which he signed most of his work.

<sup>2</sup> To avoid anachronism, I will use Du Bois’s terms, which include Negro, American Negro, colored, black(s), and darker races. Hence here “African American,” when used, denotes a position with precisely an American identification and an African or African diasporic identification.

about Gandhi's education in England and his public life in South Africa, where "He gave up the law and devoted himself to the Indian people who were being persecuted along with the natives in the land." During the Boer War, Gandhi served with the Red Cross, "attending friend and foe alike. ... For twenty years he toiled in South Africa to remove race prejudice." Upon returning to India, Gandhi was disillusioned by the repression following the First World War, "the massacre of Amritsar, and the infamous Rowlatt bills,"<sup>3</sup> at which point

He came out for Home Rule and announced his great Gospel of conquest through peace. Agitation, non-violence, refusal to cooperate with the oppressor, became his watchword and with it he is leading all India to freedom. Here and today, he stretches out his hand in fellowship to his colored friends of the West. (Du Bois and Gandhi)

Du Bois here acts as both interlocutor and introducer, as much explicator as translator: he introduces and contextualizes Gandhi, but he also defines for his readership the note and the man who wrote it. Most obviously, perhaps, he transfigures Gandhi into a specifically Christian and U.S. idiom: a colored man preaching a "great Gospel of conquest through peace." Du Bois's gloss partially reconfigures the sentences that Gandhi had put together, and it mistranslates the impulse of Gandhi's energy, for "agitation, non-violence, refusal" is a somewhat particular trinity to label as "Gandhi's

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<sup>3</sup> The Rowlatt Act of 1919 extended the regulations which Britain had been placed on Indians during the First World War, most notably in permitting the British to hold Indians without trial. The massacre on April 13, 1919 at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar was the firing upon a crowd of peaceful and unarmed civilians in a walled garden by General Dyer: 379 killed, over 1200 injured. One of the more interarticulated accounts of this period can be found in Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Picador, 1981). For a good general history of the subcontinent, see Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia : History, Culture, Political Economy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004).



watchword." This transfiguration, however, is both the conversion (the production of new objects) that makes Gandhi's work available for Du Bois's project, and the failure of translation that preserves Gandhi in his particularity.<sup>4</sup> Instead of translating Gandhi with perfect fidelity, Du Bois translates Gandhi with what we might think of as "audience fidelity": with relevance to the audience for whom *The Crisis* is written, and the space within which it takes its political stance.

Much as with the Rabindranath Tagore note discussed in the previous section, this note from Gandhi is both engaged with and distorted by Du Bois. The format and content of both of these pieces, with their interlocking layers of narration and quotation, are undeniably dialogic. In the active forms of quotation and commentary employed, moreover, these pieces approach what Mikhail Bakhtin postulated as the "double-voiced word": "any meaningful part of an utterance... [which] is perceived not as an impersonal word of language, but as the sign of another person's semantic position, as the representative of another person's utterance." (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 152) The epitome of this might be the words like "colored" and "Negro": whether pronounced by M.K. Gandhi, by Rabindranath Tagore, or by W. E. B. Du Bois, "we hear in that word another person's voice." (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 152)

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<sup>4</sup> My interest in transfiguration as a type of *failed* translation can be traced to Judith Halberstam's intervention on the potentials and possibilities of failure. See Judith Halberstam, "Notes on Failure," (USC, 2005), vol.

Not only are the solicited words reproduced and engaged with, variously, throughout these features, but they are also not entirely subordinated to Du Bois's purposes, even though Du Bois articulates his position alongside. For Bakhtin such double-voicedness relates to the writer's purposes: "Where there is no adequate form for the direct expression of the author's thoughts, he must resort to refracting them in another person's word. Sometimes the author's artistic tasks themselves are such that they can be realized only by means of the double-voiced word...." (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 159) This model of the inadequacy, for certain tasks, of speaking in one's own voice, or in any single voice, offers radical possibilities that are differently structured than the palimpsestic models of internationalism as translational or translingual practice.

The shared space of these two voices changes and reshapes them, transfiguring their separate orientations into something new and co-articulated:

Two equal-weighted words which speak to the same subject, once they have come together, must inevitably become oriented one to another. Two embodied thoughts cannot lie side by side like two objects—they must come into inner contact, i.e. must enter into a semantic bond. (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 158)

Du Bois's failure to achieve a faithful translation of the Indian material he uses, consequently, is not a limitation of his international vision but something akin to this "semantic bond," in which his words and his Indian interlocutors' words reorient themselves to each other, transfiguring an internationalism that is both unfaithful and

unstable. This is a failure of perfect comprehension that marks the limits of a certain discourse: the discourse within which agitation is legible but ahimsa<sup>5</sup> is not; within which *The Crisis* circulates but Gandhianism does not; within which are formulated the main problems to which Du Bois and *The Crisis* respond—but not necessarily those to which Indian anticolonialism responds. And it is in this shared space of internationalism, a dialogic, transfigurative, and always ephemeral space, that I want to discuss Du Bois's 1928 novel, Dark Princess: a Romance.

Dark Princess works with the material of Indian anticolonial nationalism to invigorate the creative energies of what is finally an America-focused antiracist and anticolonial effort. The protagonist, educated African American Matthew Townes, after a few hundred pages of disillusionment with both the liberal and the radical (mainly Garveyite) strains of black American activism in his context, meets and mates with the "Dark Princess," Princess Kautilya of Bwodpur, India; participates, through her acquaintance, in a (ComIntern-ish) Conference of the Darker Peoples of the World in Berlin; and discusses and dismisses Swadeshi anticolonialism in favor of global "black belt" solidarity. Finally, at the end of the novel's passionate trajectory, these problems

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<sup>5</sup> Ahimsa is conventionally translated as "non-violence." The concept stems from a variety of Sanskrit texts, finding particular significance in Jainism, as well as in Buddhism and Hinduism, and it becomes mobilized as political philosophy most famously through Gandhi. "Himsa" is, roughly, cruelty, injury, violence, harm; "a" is the negative prefix. Consequently, "ahimsa" is a bit broader and more spiritual than the English "non-violence," though the terms are often used interchangeably. The negative structure of the term, however, is crucial to understanding how it works within Gandhian philosophy; for more on this see Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi's Integrity: The Philosophy Behind the Politics," Postcolonial Studies 5.1 (2002).

are resolved through the Virginia birth of Matthew and Princess Kautilya's messianic, mixed-race, Brahminically blessed baby.

The "American Negro" of The Souls of Black Folk (1903) was a figure riven by double consciousness, suggesting a national context in which the (white) American and the "Negro" had to be sublated to a higher, better, third term if one was to have a substantive, non-racist America, with non-racist Americans in it.<sup>6</sup> The novel Dark Princess, in contrast, draws upon the 'third term' of the Indian figures of Du Bois's imaginative transfigurations, using brown bodies outside the U.S. race binary to regenerate the male protagonist of what is, finally, a 'color line' internationalism.

Dark Princess itself may be thought of as a new, assimilated self, a "vision of what the world could be if it were really a beautiful world." (W. E. B. Du Bois "Criteria of Negro Art" 18) And yet, reading the novel against Du Bois's exhortations in "Criteria of Negro Art" immediately gives pause. In that piece, delivered the year before Dark Princess's completion, Du Bois asks his audience: "Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white Americans in the essays and novels they have written. What would people in a hundred years say of black Americans?" ("Criteria" 21). The criteria for art for Du Bois should always include the

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<sup>6</sup> If Du Bois's articulation of the American Negro's "longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (2) indicates, according to Siemerling, "The same unresolved ambiguity between dialectic sublation and dialogic difference [which] returns with the notion of 'assimilation' in Du Bois's text. It appears here as an assimilation of both parts to a higher entity, not of the emergent (Negro) part to the (white) dominant." Winfried Siemerling, "W. E. B. Du Bois, Hegel, and the Staging of Alterity," Callaloo 24.1 (2001): 83.

issue of fairness in representation, the inclusion of “the kind of people you know and like and imagine” instead of the “Uncle Toms, Topsyies, good ‘darkies,’ and clowns” that “the white publishers catering to white folk” want (“Criteria” 21). When it comes to non-Americans, however, this is criteria that Dark Princess cannot pass.

The Indian characters of Dark Princess, like the Negro characters of white publishers’ texts, cater to the imagined audience of the novel, and not to criteria of cultural accuracy or historical representation. Unlike, however, “the white publishers catering to white folk,” the Du Bois novel is invested in a very different kind of transfigurative imagining. Instead of the “pre-judgment” of the white publishers’ texts, we have in Dark Princess active, engaged, and instrumental reworkings of Indian material—and, consequently, failures of international representation that both open up spaces of fissured relation and point towards generative possibilities: a third term, referential in its very misrepresentation, which can invigorate the black progressivist project to which Du Bois is so committed. This is not the supplement of Derridean thinking, built into the very structure of binary signification, but is instead a third term generated by the very act of transfiguration, and the failures of inter-national translation.

Du Bois thunders: “the white public today demands from its artists, literary and pictorial, racial pre-judgment which deliberately distorts Truth and Justice, as far as colored races are concerned, and it will pay for no other.” (“Criteria” 23) In embracing the distorting nature of representation, particularly in this Du Bois novel, I want to pull

us out of these unmet standards, by thinking Truth as not that which “eternally thrust[s] itself [upon the artist] as the highest handmaid of imagination” but as something to be worked towards through praxis, and Justice as not a component of Goodness, which is “the one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest,” but as the immanent accomplishment that marks an openness to the other. (“Criteria” 22) Ethical reading, moreover, might itself require such distortions in the text, if we understand reading, following Thomas Keenan, as “an experience of responsibility.”<sup>7</sup> For Keenan, reading is “our exposure to the singularity of a text,” and it is “the experience of language... when its power to make sense or to perform can no longer be guaranteed.” (Keenan 1, 5) An Orientalist romance like Dark Princess might be particularly productive in this frame, for “the only responsibility worthy of the name comes with the removal of grounds, the withdrawal of the rules or the knowledge on which we might rely to make our decisions for us.” (Keenan 1)

My move against demands of accuracy and comprehensiveness in representation is also an attempt to acknowledge the reasons why Du Bois turned to the romance novel for his internationalist practice at that particular juncture. Claudia Tate has argued that the 1920’s were a particularly depressing time in terms of “a severe re-entrenchment of

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<sup>7</sup> I am here using, accordingly, Keenan’s conception of responsibility, as the dilemma of decision-making and not the decision itself: “If responsibility has always been thought in the Western ethical, political, and literary traditions as a matter of articulating what is known with what is done, we propose resuscitating it as an asymmetry or an interruption between the orders of cognition and of action. It is when we do not know exactly what we should do, when the effects and conditions of our actions can no longer be calculated, and when we have nowhere else to turn, not even back onto our “self,” that we encounter something like responsibility.” Keenan, Fables of Responsibility : Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics 1-2.

racism"; consequently, "it is not surprising that Dark Princess... maintains racial optimism by projecting it onto an apocalyptic tradition." (Tate 190) For Arnold Rampersad, who claims that Du Bois "was the first black American intellectual to look to India and the East as primary forms of inspiration" (165), Du Bois's turn to fiction relates to his disillusionment with realist approaches to internationalist work, such as with Pan-African Congresses and the League of Nations. The novel, however, is for Rampersad an inadequate response to the situations it addresses: neither "real politics," nor even "the realist novel," this romance is for him a shadowy failure.<sup>8</sup> In his piquant lament: "Gandhi had real politics; Du Bois had not even the realist novel; he had, in 1928, only the romance, as he called *Dark Princess* in its subtitle. (Rampersad 174)

While it may well be that in 1920s America other forms of "racial optimism" seemed foreclosed, to reduce his generic choice into an escapist vote for fantasy is to misread the pragmatics of the realist novel as opposed to the self-declared romance.<sup>9</sup> For if, as Brent Edwards has argued, in the case of black peoples in Europe and the U.S. creative cultural production was constantly being (re)framed and (re)articulated as anthropological evidence, each work of art thus becoming an "ethnographic event" (Edwards 79), the willful declaration of Dark Princess as a romance starts to appear as something more significant than an escapist lack of "real politics" (Rampersad 174). To

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<sup>8</sup> "In his weakness for royalty and wealth, in his unwillingness to repudiate even justifiable violence or to rise totally above racial antagonism, Du Bois (as the guiding spirit of *Dark Princess*) begs comparison and contrast with Gandhi. The Mahatma's life and career offer a practical critique of Du Bois's romance...." Arnold Rampersad, "Du Bois's Passage to India," W. E. B. Du Bois on Race and Culture: Philosophy, Politics, and Poetics, eds. Bernard W. Bell, Emily Grosholz and James B. Stewart (New York and London: Routledge, 1996) 173.

<sup>9</sup> For an explanation of what I mean by "realism," please see the Introduction.

declare the book a “romance,” after all, is to refuse to be an informant: it is to lay claim to a life of fantasy and desire, as opposed to an oft-simplified realism of a subject marked by racism as already and inescapably intellectually and emotionally deficient.<sup>10</sup>

The attempt to build solidarity among the colored peoples of the world, moreover, is invariably to work with figural language—red, black, yellow, brown—upon a problem that Du Bois increasingly saw in entirely materialist terms.<sup>11</sup> This might be epitomized in a 1924 essay in which he discusses racism and colonialism as constitutive effects of capitalism and modernity, and yet in the same breath speaks of the “vast gulf between the red-black South and the yellow-brown East.” (W. E. B. Du Bois “The Negro Mind Reaches Out” 386) Neither the South nor the East are literally red-black or yellow-brown, but they are, quite literally, “all victims of white colonialism,” which forms the first clause of that same sentence. To take Du Bois’s figural investments seriously is not to escape the realm of real politics, whatever that might be, but to take seriously the ways in which anti-racist anti-imperialism must necessarily be figural and practical, accommodating both romance and realism, at once.

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<sup>10</sup> “In the 1920s, there developed a multidisciplinary and relatively flexible apparatus for framing *les nègres*, combining popular cultural and administrative and academic techniques. The novel approaches social science, anthropology flirts with fiction, and jazz itself is viewed even by the most perceptive Parisian listeners not as an expression of a “black counterculture of modernity,” but more as an “African” ethnographic event, even as a sort of religious possession ceremony. In this sleight of hand, American jazz... becomes a document of Africa.” Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora : Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* 79.

<sup>11</sup> As he puts it in 1936, “European exploitation desires the black slave, the Chinese coolie, and the Indian laborer for the same ends and the same purposes, and calls them all “niggers.” W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Clash of Colour: Indians and American Negroes,” *W. E. B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*, eds. Bill Mullen and Cathryn Watson (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2005) 8.



Insofar as we can read Dark Princess's protagonists as demonstrating a didactic lesson of proper politics *and* proper aesthetics (in Du Bois's opinion), the novel operates akin to a fable, which Keenan glosses generally as "any exemplary allegory of decision." (2) Much like the lack of grounds that constitutes reading as an ethical practice, the limited nature of any fable is what makes it didactically effective: "Devoted again and again to installing or restoring subjectivity as the sine qua non of responsible action and the claim to rights, the fable, which wants to offer lessons, only opens up the most abyssal aporias instead. To teach singularity it offers comparison, to underline independence it resorts to necessity." (Keenan 2)

Dark Princess has failed and disappointed many commentators, for a variety of reasons, from its first publication onwards. The Orientalism of the novel is difficult to contest; that this is a hopeless failure of the novel (Weinbaum 2007; Ahmad 2002) is what I would like to question. The most interesting of these Orientalism critiques might be Bill Mullen's "Afro-Orientalism," which he describes as:

a combination of passionate intellectual desire to wed African American political interest and African American support to Asian destiny, and an at times incomplete, romanticized, or willful analysis of events there. ... Afro-Orientalism... may be understood as a counterdiscourse to modernity which simultaneously threatened blacks and Asians with perpetual subjugation, exploitation, and division and yet, dialectically, made both visible and urgent the need for Afro-Asian unity. (Mullen "Introduction: Crossing the World Color Line" xiv-xv)

Du Bois's work, including Dark Princess, is for Mullen marked by this problematic but well-intentioned condition:

Though clearly a brave and brazen critique of antimiscegenation hysteria, and a fascinating rendering of radical love, Dark Princess, in its rendering of Princess Kautilya, bespeaks a tendency in Du Bois to both “feminize” Asia in his corpus of writing and to transform it into an object of utopian political and cultural fantasias. (Mullen "Introduction: Crossing the World Color Line" xvi)

I do not disagree with Mullen’s diagnosis; I do, however, find it a dead end.<sup>12</sup> An early twentieth century novel which proclaims itself “A Romance” is unlikely to meet the standards of accuracy that we demand of realism; and the choice of romance for internationalist work, especially by someone with Marxist investments, might demand a different reading practice, appropriate to the investments that generic marker suggests.<sup>13</sup>

What is going on in Dark Princess, and what is incarnated in the messianic baby, is the kind of transfiguring work, the responding to and reworking of another’s politics and culture, that makes internationalism possible. Du Bois’s transfiguration of Indian anticolonialism in Dark Princess perhaps most explicitly responds to Gandhi. Gandhi’s trajectory is echoed in odd and surprising ways through Kautilya, starting with their common youth and education in England, which is marked in both cases by admiration and Anglicization, followed by disillusionment. His coming into political consciousness is meticulously manifest in Kautilya’s revelatory experiences administering to injured Indians in France in an ambulance unit during First World War. This plot device is

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<sup>12</sup> A major difference between his argument and mine might be that I read Dark Princess as more eschatological than utopian, that is, far more temporal than spatial in the shape of its political imaginary. For the longer version of his argument, see Bill Mullen, Afro-Orientalism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> One direction to go with this might be to think about twentieth century romance itself as a kind of “failed realism,” especially in how it tends to be read, criticized, and dismissed.

directly evocative of Gandhi's work in organizing Indian Ambulance Corps for the Boer War (1899) and the Zulu Rebellion (1906), and even more specifically his organizing of an Indian Ambulance Corps in England in 1914. The attack upon her for betrayal that is perpetrated by an Indian stevedore, moreover, is strikingly similar to the manner in which Gandhi was attacked in 1908 by an Indian Pathan, Mir Alam, for reaching a compromise agreement with General Smuts of Pretoria—a moment in which, once again, the proponents of radical anti-racist and anti-colonial work found themselves in stark opposition to Gandhi.<sup>14</sup>

In Bill Mullen's estimation, "More than any African or African American leader, it is Gandhi who qualifies as Du Bois's most passionately admired statesman and activist of the twentieth century. ... Gandhi was the most accessible prototype of an effective race rebel." (Du Bois, Mullen and Watson 114) Gandhi operates for Du Bois as an emphatically mystical and religious figure, a "Prince of Peace" whose spiritual and political program provide a solution, above all, to what Du Bois describes as feeling "torn by the problem of peace": the suspicion that racist oppression can only be overcome by violent means. (W. E. B. Du Bois "Gandhi and the American Negroes") Gandhian philosophy, moreover, fits quite neatly into Du Bois's Hegelian vision of

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<sup>14</sup> Gandhi's first-person account of this attack, and of his other experiences in South Africa, can be found in M.K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, trans. Valji Govindji Desai (Madras: S. Ganesan, 1928).

historical progress and teleology, providing in his estimation a dialectical counter, an antithesis, to the world wars that simultaneously mark the early twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

In a 1957 article in *Gandhi Marg*, Du Bois relates Gandhi's trajectory and his own growth side by side, as though they were uninformed comrades in a shared struggle, separated only by ignorance, but moved along similar lines by the spirit of the age. Here he says that at Fisk he "learned not only of the condition of American Negroes but began to read of China and India; and to make Africa the special object of my study." (W. E. B. Du Bois "Gandhi and the American Negroes" 154) At the time of writing *Dark Princess*, Du Bois may even been familiar with Gandhi's self-articulations, which tend to efface many of the more typically public events for a detailed, almost obsessive, account of the *bildung* of his soul.<sup>16</sup> He got to know of Gandhi through his acquaintance with "[Lala] Lajpat Rai and Madame [Sarojini] Naidu," and John Haynes Holmes. "Indeed the 'Coloured People' referred to in our name was not originally confined to America. I

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<sup>15</sup> In 1957 Du Bois writes of what he sees as the failure of the civil rights movement to end racial violence, as well as the general upheaval of the age, thinking, once again, of Gandhi, and asking: "What is the synthesis of this paradox of eternal and world-wide war and the coming of the Prince of Peace?" Du Bois ends this essay with another pivotal question:

Can we then by effort make the average white person in states like South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana normal, intelligent human beings?

If we can, we solve our antithesis; great Gandhi lives again. If we cannot civilize the South, or will not even try, we continue in contradiction and riddle.

W. E. B. Du Bois, "Will the Great Gandhi Live Again?," *W. E. B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*, eds. Bill Mullen and Cathryn Watson (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Gandhi's autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, published serially in *Young India* from December 1925, was being published in the U.S. from April 1926 in John Haynes Holmes' journal, *Unity*. For more on the circulation and reception of Gandhi's texts in U.S. progressive movements, see Vijay Prashad, "That Strange Little Brown Man, Gandhi," (2005), vol.

remember the discussion we had on inviting Gandhi to visit America and how we were forced to conclude that this land was not civilized enough to receive a coloured man as an honoured guest." (W. E. B. Du Bois "Gandhi and the American Negroes" 155) Du Bois here provides an account of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in which the use of non-violent cooperation in that struggle was *not* directly inspired by Gandhi:<sup>17</sup>

It was not based on any first-hand knowledge of Gandhi and his work. Their leaders like Martin Luther King knew of non-resistance in India; many of the educated teachers, business and professional men had heard of Gandhi. But the rise and spread of this movement was due to the truth of its underlying principles and not to direct teaching or propaganda. In this aspect it is a most interesting proof of the truth of the Gandhian philosophy. (157)

Here subliminal transmission proves the universality of what Du Bois terms "Gandhian philosophy," and what we might more generally term Gandhi's political strategy. The specifics of Gandhi, Du Bois's "Prince of Peace," are simply not as important as the ways in which his influence can be traced, even subliminally. It is this tracing of implicit influences, rather than careful intellectual genealogies, that Dark Princess compels us to undertake.

Du Bois placed sustained and committed emphasis and attention on India in his political work, producing in the process a very specific formulation of the subcontinent. India for Du Bois is distinctively colored, even black, and its history is one of "of the

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<sup>17</sup> The Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-'56) was a boycott by U.S. blacks of the bus system in Montgomery, Alabama, in protest of the policy of racial segregation and discrimination on public transit. It is widely considered one of the first major victories of the U.S. civil rights movement, and one of the first events to garner national attention for Martin Luther King, Jr.

fierce struggles between these whites [Aryans] and blacks [original inhabitants] for the mastery of India." (W. E. B. Du Bois "Asia in Africa" 9) This is followed in his account by widespread miscegenation, including across caste lines, so that "Today some of the Brahmans are as black and as flat-nosed as the early Negro chiefs." (W. E. B. Du Bois "Asia in Africa" 10) Moreover, "The culture of the black Dravidians underlies the whole culture of India, whose greatest religious leader [the Buddha] is often limned as black and curly-haired." (W. E. B. Du Bois "Asia in Africa" 10)

While Du Bois staunchly supported Indian independence, he also wrote that India is undoubtedly "a congerie of ignorant, poverty-stricken, antagonistic groups who are destined to go through all the hell of internal strife before they emancipate themselves." (W. E. B. Du Bois "Prospect of a World without Racial Conflict" 129-30) And while he asserted in 1947 that "The fifteenth of August [Indian independence] deserves to be remembered as the greatest historical date of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," he had no kind words for M.A. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, as a selfish traitor.<sup>18</sup> (W. E. B. Du Bois "The Freeing of India" 145) Du Bois's historical narrative, moreover, emphasizes a series of revolts in India from 1758 to 1850, "culminating in the great mutiny of 1852," by which he presumably means the 1857

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<sup>18</sup> This essay, "Freeing India," might be Du Bois's most sweeping overview of India, written as a kind of primer for *Crisis* readers. The sections of this essay, "Freeing India," are entitled "Indian Panorama," "Early Indian Education," "English Repression," and "Indian Revolts." It emphasizes India's greatness and its coloredness, and is, as usual, punctuated by lengthy quotes from other sources/anticolonial activists. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Freeing of India," *W. E. B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*, eds. Bill Mullen and Cathryn Watson (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2005) 151.

Revolt, then called the Sepoy Mutiny. (W. E. B. Du Bois "The Freeing of India" 151) It seems that while Du Bois admired the "Prince of Peace," he was unwilling, even in 1947, to narrate the world-historical independence of colored peoples as being achieved without violent uprisings of the kind seen in the Revolt of 1857.

Finally, prejudiced attitudes between the two groups were not a mystery to Du Bois. His attempt to wed (or, more accurately, to mate) India and black America in Dark Princess is not ignorant idealism<sup>19</sup> but instead a labored achievement of post-racist consciousness. This is marked in the novel's plot by the moments in which the Indians and Japanese (among others) doubt whether African Americans deserve a seat at their international conference; it is also marked, more explicitly and didactically, in publications by Du Bois both in India and in the U.S. Black American racism towards other non-white races is not unknown to Du Bois; as he writes in 1957, "In our effort to be recognized as Americans, we American Negroes naturally strove to think American and adopt American folkways. We began to despise all yellow, brown and black peoples." (W. E. B. Du Bois "The American Negro and the Darker World" 49)

Indian racism, similarly, forms a real temptation to which India often but not invariably succumbs:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For this argument see Claudia Tate, "Race and Desire: *Dark Princess: A Romance*," Next to the Color Line, eds. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Du Bois tends to speak of a subject "India" and object peoples "Indians." This paragraph is first found in an unpublished essay entitled simply "India," a pedagogical piece written in 1936 or 1937, in which Du Bois argues carefully for the need for Indians and American Negroes to see their shared interests and common

India has also had temptation to stand apart from the darker peoples and seek her affinities among whites. She has long wished to regard herself as "Aryan" rather than "colored" and to think of herself as much nearer physically and spiritually to Germany and England than to Africa, China, or the South Seas. And yet the history of the modern world shows the futility of this thought. European exploitation desires the black slave, the Chinese coolie, and the Indian laborer for the same ends and the same purposes, and calls them all "niggers." (W. E. B. Du Bois "The Clash of Colour: Indians and American Negroes" 8)

Writing in 1936 in the theosophical journal *Aryan Path*, Du Bois asserts that the difficulties of cultivating "understanding, sympathy, and co-operation" between American Negroes and Indian people is based in their lack of knowledge about each other:

To the editors of the great news agencies, Indians and Negroes are not news. They distribute, therefore, and emphasise only such things as are bizarre and uncommon: lynchings and mobs in the Southern States of the United States, dialect and funny stories; and from India, stories of religious frenzy, fights between Hindus and Mohammedans, the deeds of masters of magic and the wealth of Indian princes. (W. E. B. Du Bois "The Clash of Colour: Indians and American Negroes" 68-9)

This argument is not dissimilar from the publishing and representation concerns of his 1926 NAACP address, and it shows remarkable sensitivity to the Orientalist scholarly climate by which Du Bois was undoubtedly influenced.<sup>21</sup> Du Bois also points out, in this Bombay-based publication, that when Indians come to the U.S.,

they meet a peculiar variation of the Colour Line. An Indian may be dark in colour, but if he dons his turban and travels in the South, he does not

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struggle. See W. E. B. Du Bois, Bill Mullen and Cathryn Watson, *W.E.B. Du Bois on Asia : Crossing the World Color Line*, 1st ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005) 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> For the sources of much of Du Bois's India-related material, which includes Anglo-European scholars as well as Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography* (1940) and *Glimpses of World History* (1942), see Mullen 2.



have to be subjected to the separate-car laws and other discriminations against Negroes in that part of the country where the mass of Negroes live. This public recognition of the fact that he is not a Negro may, and often does, flatter his vanity so that he rather rejoices that in this country at least he is not as other dark men are, but is classified with the Whites. (W. E. B. Du Bois "The Clash of Colour: Indians and American Negroes" 70)

Du Bois adds that this applies only to wealthy Indians; an Indian who tries "for employment or for citizenship or any economic status" would "find the tables quite turned" (W. E. B. Du Bois "The Clash of Colour: Indians and American Negroes" 70) Du Bois may be thinking here of *United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind* (261 U.S. 204), a 1923 case in which the Supreme Court ruled that "a high caste Hindu of full Indian blood" might be Aryan but is not white, and therefore, being neither white nor of African descent, he is ineligible for citizenship. Finally, while "the percentage of visitors between these groups" will always remain small, Du Bois feels that a lot can be done "through literature and especially literature<sup>22</sup> directed toward the masses of these two peoples." (W. E. B. Du Bois "The Clash of Colour: Indians and American Negroes" 70) Bad literature, moreover, can be destructive: the myth of European benevolence in India "stems from the literary propaganda of which Rudyard Kipling was the especial example, which has led people for decades to picture India a great and backward country led by powerful, honest and semi-royal whites, and represented by a few

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<sup>22</sup> Du Bois holds up Lajpat Rai's *United States* as exemplary of how this can be achieved; he also argues for inclusion of Indian items in Negro newspapers in the U.S. His model, moreover, is not simply one of reportage, but of guest contributions and guest voices being incorporated, much as we see in the pieces he solicits for *The Crisis*. See Lala Lajpat Rai, *The United States of America; a Hindu's Impressions and a Study* (Calcutta;: R. Chatterjee, 1916).

gorgeously caparisoned Princes with millions of dollars in jewels and income.” (W. E. B. Du Bois "The Freeing of India" 146)

Du Bois's India is but one point in a larger global project of the emancipation of the colored peoples of the world, and accordingly Du Bois makes use of Indian material not only to glorify and support Indian struggles but also, as needed, to bolster his own. The conversionary work of such progressive internationalism produces objects, discursive and otherwise, that are available for antiracist and anticolonial resistance. Matthew and Kautilya's illegitimate affair, for example, effects a problematic conversion of the Hindu narrative of Radha-Krishna (311), but in doing so it strengthens Du Bois's project to "distinguish 'sexual immorality,' for which the slave past and the Jim Crow present bear equal responsibility, from African Americans' 'legitimate, beneficent appetite' for sex, an attitude 'in many respects healthier and more reasonable' than that of other cultures." (Cooppan Move on Down the Line: Domestic Science, Transnational Politics, and Gendered Allegory in Du Bois 22) It also enables an aesthetic valorization of the black body, for the famously desirable and seductive Krishna is generally depicted as a very dark, often blue-skinned, man. This transfiguration of the Hindu narrative into the Du Boisean one also bolsters an African American exceptionalism that recurs throughout the novel. Radha is the individual soul, striving for union with the universal, Krishna, and Matthew's positioning as Krishna works perfectly with a formulation in which the American Negro is the only member of the darker peoples of

the world who can see through the illusions, the *maya*, of race imperialism's hegemony.<sup>23</sup>

The American Negro, to whom Kautilya's first reaction is, "How singular-how very singular!" (W. E. B. Du Bois Dark Princess: A Romance 10) encompasses the singularity of the enlightened race leader; in Matthew's words, "Singularly enough, we black folk of America are the only ones of the darker world who see white folk and their civilization with level eyes and unquickened pulse" (233).<sup>24</sup>

Another decisively useful application of Indian/Hindu typography for Du Bois's project is his transfiguration of the "black all-mother" into the Hindu theography of the mother goddess, specifically that of Kali, whose name literally means the black one.<sup>25</sup> As

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<sup>23</sup> Du Bois revises this leadership thesis in a 1957 essay, "The American Negro and the Darker World," in which he argues that "After the First World War we Negroes were in advance of many colored peoples" and so we started to lead Africans, in important part through the Pan-African Congresses. After the Second World War, however, "We American Negroes can no longer lead the colored peoples of the world because they far better than we understand what is happening in the world today. But we can try to catch up with them." For him this involves reading about China, India, and Indonesia; learning about the expansion of socialism; and supporting the welfare state in the U.S. This world socialism, of course, is not racist but it is also not post-race; as he says in the final line, we must "stand ready to meet and cooperate with world socialism as it grows among white and black." W. E. B. Du Bois, "The American Negro and the Darker World," W. E. B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line, eds. Bill Mullen and Cathryn Watson (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2005) 54-55.

<sup>24</sup> The programmatic needed for each country are also, importantly, different, as laid out in the following, rather flatfooted, passage:

"Here in America black folk must help overthrow the rule of the rich by distributing wealth more evenly first among themselves and then in alliance with white labor, to establish democratic control of industry. During the process they must keep step and hold tight hands with the other struggling darker peoples."

"Difficult-difficult," mused Kautilya, "for the others have so different a path. In my India, for instance, we must first emancipate ourselves from the subtle and paralyzing misleading of England.... Then we must learn to rule ourselves politically and to organize our old industry on new modern lines for two objects: our own social uplift and our own defense against Europe and America."

W. E. B. Du Bois, Dark Princess: A Romance (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995) 256-7.

<sup>25</sup> My use of the awkward term "Indian/Hindu" is an attempt to acknowledge the Hindu theology from which these concepts arise while also signaling that it is their centrality to the project of an Indian nation

Kautilya exclaims to Matthew, “Your mother is Kali, the Black One; wife of Siva, Mother of the World!” (220)<sup>26</sup> In this construction, the “black all-mother” operates as an aggregation that reinforces Du Bois’s color line solidarities, conflating not only the feminine figures but also obscuring, through the shared experience of maternity, the differential histories of brown and black folks.<sup>27</sup> Through such transfigurations, the text uses “black India,” out of which “the world was born,” and “the black womb of India [into which] the world shall creep to die” (227) to ground and validate Du Bois’s reclaiming of black American maternity.

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that may concern Du Bois here. To say just “Hindu” would efface the particularly national character through which Du Bois imagines his Hindus (and Indians); to say just “Indian” might suggest an equivalence of Indianness and Hinduness which, while it may be operating in Du Bois’s 1928 novel, would be, in 2008, more political endorsement than cultural statement.

Du Bois’s close friendship with Lala Lajpat Rai, however, may have determined the particularly *Hindu* version of “Indianness” we get in this Du Bois work, for Lajpat Rai’s nationalist vision had a strong Hindu fervor: “Lajpat Rai was a legator of the Arya Samaj (Aryan Society) led by Dayanand Saraswati which had, in late-nineteenth-century Punjab and western U.P., sought to include reformist postures on issues such as child marriage, widow remarriage, idolatry, travel overseas, and caste – within a framework of the assertion of Hindu supremacy over other religious faiths.” Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, Modern South Asia : History, Culture, Political Economy (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998) 111.

<sup>26</sup> This figure, of course, is first found in “Of the Dawn to Freedom” section of Du Bois’s 1903 The Souls of Black Folk. The voluminous and unstable nature of the Du Bois corpus, both primary and secondary, means that even as Hazel Carby criticizes the trope of Souls’ black mother as a pathological depiction of black women’s rape under slavery as responsible for black men’s failings *and* equivalent or at least parallel to the disastrous Act of Compromise of 1877, Joy James, in the very same 2007 collection, claims that “Du Bois’s casting of black women as types transformed antiblack female stereotypes or caricatures such as the “mammy” into that of the black Christian martyr.” (75) Accordingly, my referencing, in this chapter, of the Souls material comes with the disclaimer that, for the purposes of my argument, one need not take sides on the pathologising or redemptive values of the black all-mother. What matters, in the context of my reading of Dark Princess, is not simply (as in Carby’s or James’s readings of Souls) that the black mother is figured as such; what interests me is her *transfigurative* possibilities and powers in the emphatically internationalist agenda of Du Bois’s later book.

For both the Carby and the James essays, see Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, eds., Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W. E. B. Du Bois (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> For more on the implications of this conflation of the maternal imago and the love object, see Tate, “Race and Desire: *Dark Princess: A Romance*.” For an analysis of the intercultural implications of this narrative move, see Dohra Ahmad, “‘More Than Romance’: Genre and Geography in *Dark Princess*,” Elh 69.3 (2002).

Du Bois also makes gleeful use of Indian/Hindu tropes of the guru, and particularly of renunciation, thus engaging with the very practice that he later condemns as irrelevant to the United States.<sup>28</sup> Such tropes surface in the novel to bolster its narrative, strengthening through referents that exist outside of Du Bois's configuration but operate here in their transfigured forms. For example, Kautilya tells Matthew that:

"And when I saw that old mother of yours... I knew that I was looking upon one of the ancient prophets of India and that she was to lead me out of the depths in which I found myself and up to the atonement for which I yearned. So I started with her upon that path of seven years....

"You had stepped down into menial service at my request.... It was now my turn to step down to the bottom of the world and see it for myself. So I put aside my silken garments and cut my hair, and, selling my jewels, I started out on the long path which should lead to you." (221)

In a curious evocation of the story of the Buddha, and one notably different from the form that Matthew's renunciation takes, Du Bois here constructs a feminine variety of spiritual wisdom that pushes both the Oriental and the female in troubling directions.<sup>29</sup> What is particularly fascinating is the way in which this guru narrative is entirely new: even as it brings together and reconfigures Indian tropes of the guru and of renunciation, it transfigures them to create, in its mistranslation, an entirely new "long path." (221) Renunciation in Du Bois's text is industrial and urban, it is a

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<sup>28</sup> Du Bois wrote in the 1943 *Crisis* a "searing attack on [A. Philip] Randolph's desire to adopt Gandhianism," articulating Gandhi as irreparably foreign and emphasizing, according to Vijay Prashad, that "fasting, public prayer and self-sacrifice have been 'bred into the very bone of India for more than three thousand years'.... Blacks, he wrote, should not 'blindly copy methods without thought and consideration.'" Quoted in Prashad, "That Strange Little Brown Man, Gandhi," vol., 16.

<sup>29</sup> In Dohra Ahmad's reading, "If a Southern, maternal nostalgia initially brought Kautilya into being, she in turn now reinvents the mother as a guru of vernacular wisdom." Ahmad, "'More Than Romance': Genre and Geography in *Dark Princess*," 796.

renunciation of Chicago subway digging, instead of the agricultural and pastoral. It is also importantly, and perhaps consequently, oriented towards interdependency, towards eating in dirty mess houses, instead of the logics of self-sufficiency, of making one's own meals and clothing, that undergird Gandhian thought. It is also, crucially, (hetero)sexual. Matthew's renunciation of worldly comfort, for instance, makes his body "singularly strong" through his manly digging for the subway. In stark contrast to the emaciated figure of Gandhi, Matthew begins to look like a "hard-limbed Grecian athlete": "I am bare, sweating, untrammelled. My muscles already begin to flow smooth and unconfined. I have no stomach, either in flesh or spirit. My body is all life and eagerness, without weight." (265) The stomachless figure of the man who has renounced, thus, becomes an erotic classical figure, transfiguring (black) manual labor by reclaiming and transfiguring a "hard-limbed Grecian" culture, one touted as birthplace of democracy and of Western civilization in general.

We can contrast this dramatically with what Dipesh Chakrabarty reads as the most distinctive move of Gandhian politics: Gandhi, he argues, "eventually came to separate the question of character, not so much from the body,... as from the issue of sheer physical strength." (Chakrabarty Habitations of Modernity 59) Gandhian renunciation's move away from the satisfaction of the senses is a move away, too, from the body, and not the refining of the body that Du Bois seems to be depicting here. Indeed, Du Bois seems to combine here the class- and labor-impulses of Gandhian

renunciation with the aestheticist commitments of what Michele Elam and Paul C. Taylor have identified as part of “a consciously avowed perfectionist agenda.” (Elam and Taylor 211) In their reading, “Work here is not just about the masses united; it is about getting in political shape. ... And thus Kautilya’s body, too, is always a political spectacle and, in the logic of the novel, a spectacular register of political progress.” (229)

Following the Gandhian register of renunciation, however, marks the ways in which the spectacularity of the body can become linked to a political shape marked by emaciation and apparent enfeeblement – not the Grecian sweating bodies of which Elam and Taylor speak. The logic of Dark Princess, consequently, is one that faithfully reproduces neither Western nor Gandhian ideas of “getting in political shape.” Instead, by holding them in transfiguration, it maintains the tension between the spectacularly strong body and the spectacularly emaciated one: maintaining, then, in Matthew, the visible spectacle of muscular political strength, while removing, in Kautilya, the necessity for such outward manifestations thereof.

Whereas Indian nationalism’s use of renunciation relates to a discourse of self-control, of rather literal sensory abnegation (prolonged fasting, for instance), Du Bois’s transfigured ideal of renunciation relates instead to the materialism and debauchery in America which he perceived as a threat to his priorities for Negro advancement. Kautilya’s renunciation-as-slumming, for instance, is definitively informed by the sexual harassment and attempted rape she experiences. (Dark Princess 222-3) Matthew’s

stepping down from privilege, however, explicitly references Indian/Hindu ideas of the virtue of renunciation as a spiritual and ethical practice, for it is inspired by what Kautilya's words:

“In my land, you know, men often, in their strong struggle with life, go out and leave life and strip themselves of everything material that could impede or weigh the soul, and sit naked and alone before their God. Perhaps, Matthew, it would be well for you to do this. A little space- a little space.” (263)

What Matthew does, however, is not a going outwards and leaving life but something entirely different, a renunciation that in its radically different priorities is not a translation but a transfiguration. It responds, it refutes, it dismisses, it mystifies, it exalts, it executes a complex and vexed relation to the Indian other that cannot be understood as a simple translation, a shifting or transferring or carrying across of meaning, but a transfiguration, a reshaping or reforming of something whose meaning, always unstable in its complex contextuality, is not the primary concern.

Du Bois's transfigurations of Gandhian tools and Hindu beliefs cannot be usefully considered in terms of correct and incorrect relations to the other.

Transfiguration, in a sense, is the well-intentioned, belabored failure to comprehend the other whom you have enthusiastically hailed as a comrade in your struggles.

Translation can be termed successful or unsuccessful, but transfiguration can be measured not by its correctness but by its effects. It is this well-intentioned laborious



failure that Dark Princess displays, and it is also, I would argue, the form of Du Boisean internationalism beyond simply pan-Africanism.

The most typical reading of Du Bois's oeuvre, of course, runs from an early nation-focused engagement with issues of anti-black racism in the U.S. to a later, finally communist, internationalist anti-racism. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for instance, writes this narrative in the series introduction to a recent Oxford University Press reissue of all of Du Bois's work. Gates tells us, for instance, that "the 'blacker' that his stand against colonialism became, the less 'black,' in a very real sense, his analysis of what he famously called 'The Negro Problem' simultaneously became." (Gates xv) For Gates, then, to read Du Bois is to wonder:

"How does the greatest black intellectual in the twentieth century... make the rhetorical turn from defining the Negro American as a metaphor for modernity, at the turn of the century, to defining the Negro—at mid-century—as a metonym of a much larger historical pattern of social deviance and social dominance that had long been central to the fabric of world order, to the fabric of European and American domination of such a vast portion of the world of color?" (Gates xvi)

Dark Princess is followed, for Du Bois, by two unabashedly internationalist *and* unambiguously "black" books, both in the genre of fact and not fiction: Africa, Its Geography, People and Products and Africa—Its Place in Modern History, both published in 1930.<sup>30</sup> To look at Dark Princess is inevitably to look at the question of

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<sup>30</sup> For more on these see Emmanuel Akyeampong's introduction to the recently reissued volumes: W. E. B. Du Bois, Africa, Its Geography, People, and Products; and, Africa, Its Place in Modern History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

blackness insofar as the novel puts it in conversation with brownness towards a specific internationalist goal.

Du Bois is certainly better known as a pan-Africanist than as a theorist of African-Asian unity, but this relates, at least in part, to factors extrinsic to his work. Du Bois's pan-Africanism is publicly structured, particularly through the Pan-African Congresses, in a manner which makes it far more visible than his work on Asia.<sup>31</sup> In terms of his reception, existing discourses of diasporic identification, among others, were available for Du Bois as a black American concerned heavily with Africa. No such cultural discourse is automatically available for understanding this black American intellectual as particularly engaged in building solidarity with Asia. Within the academy, disciplinary boundaries and institutional formations play a role: Dark Princess, for instance, was "published at the height of the Harlem Renaissance, but in part because of its focus on events outside the U.S.—Berlin, India, and Japan—has rarely been considered a key text to that movement, even though Du Bois was living in Harlem when he wrote it." (Mullen "Introduction: Crossing the World Color Line" xi)

Despite this tendency towards an American or African-American reading of Du Bois's oeuvre, internationalism can be posited as not just important but intrinsic to *all* of his work. Du Bois's conception of double consciousness and the color line which belts

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<sup>31</sup> For more on this see Bill Mullen, who argues that "Du Bois's work also offers the most copious canvas for understanding black-Asian exchange of any American or African American intellectual of the twentieth century." Bill Mullen, "Introduction: Crossing the World Color Line," W. E. B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line, eds. Bill Mullen and Cathryn Watson (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2005).

the world, not just the nation, can be traced throughout the trajectory of his work. Political identification in Du Bois is always subtended by the category of the global: nationalism and globalism operate as “mutually sustaining conditions of being” (300), through a “spatiotemporal plot of simultaneity” and not a teleology of progression, of first national, and then global, consciousness.<sup>32</sup> (Cooppan “The Double Politics of Double Consciousness: Nationalism and Globalism in *the Souls of Black Folk*” 316) This is made absolutely explicit in a 1914 revision of his color-line thesis, in which the *global* nature of the color line is exactly why “the Negro problem” deserves *national* attention. “The average American is apt to regard the Negro problem as parochial and temporary,” but “If such men would look carefully around them,” they would realize that it is “the opening page of a new era,” and not “the closing chapter of a past history.” This is because “the diversified races of the world” are coming into closer and closer contact: “We are nearer China today than we were to San Francisco yesterday.” (W. E. B. Du Bois “The World Problem of the Color Line”) It is also, in this instance, precisely the diversified races, and not the single black race, that are converging in this moment just before the First World War. Du Bois’s vision, even at this critical juncture, is emphatically more than just African-American, or even exclusively pan-African.

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<sup>32</sup> For Cooppan, this simultaneity of the global and the national can be traced through *Souls*, for “Double consciousness thus describes a psychic time that is simultaneously a political space; a time whose back-and-forth movement provides the measure of a nationalism and globalism that can never be plotted on a timeline of ideological progress (nationalism first, globalism after). ... double consciousness attempts to understand race, nation, and globe in terms of the quite different spatiotemporal plot of simultaneity.” Vilashini Cooppan, “The Double Politics of Double Consciousness: Nationalism and Globalism in *the Souls of Black Folk*,” *Public Culture* 17.2 (2005): 316.

Cooppan argues that cosmopolitanism “as an ideology of border crossing” is fundamental to the early and foundational Souls.<sup>33</sup> For her, Du Bois’s pivotal concept of double consciousness produces something like the Freudian “analytic plot,” which uses memory as the vehicle of a particular inter/nationalist detour. It is the modality of racial memory that unites the “proleptic time of national belonging” with the “analeptic time of global longing,” putting together black people in America with those in Africa. (302) This conception of memory as migrancy, moreover, takes us “not so much *away* from the national-racial particular as out of it and then back again,” producing a “psychic politics of location” in which “being national” always also means “feeling global.” (303) In this Du Bois, the temporality of memory sutures world and nation together, so that even the most American of contexts must necessarily be saturated with a global political vision.<sup>34</sup>

While Cooppan’s argument is both suggestive and persuasive, I hesitate at her use of “globalism” and “cosmopolitanism” to discuss Du Bois’s political investments. Du Bois’s universalism, if it can be so called, is emphatically one among the darker races of the world, with racial differences not obliterated but represented and reconciled. This

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<sup>33</sup> For Cooppan, moreover, double consciousness also produces the very form of Souls, or what she terms its “dialectical formalism”: “its doubling of the thing it describes and the form in which it does so.” (308) Hence, “Souls’ oft-cited polydiscursivity is in this sense the dialectical form of double consciousness writ large—a persistent twinning of such seemingly opposed yet intimately entwined idioms...” Cooppan, “The Double Politics of Double Consciousness: Nationalism and Globalism in *the Souls of Black Folk*,” 309.

<sup>34</sup> Cooppan argues that allegory for Du Bois is “what allows for history’s double cast: in the Benjaminian mode of ruin, as the cause of the decay and disorganization that haunts the racial subject; and in the Jamesonian mode of revolution, as the very means of that subject’s deliverance.” (313) Du Bois’s internationalism takes a form akin to double consciousness, for in his refusal to choose between the national and the global she sees “a state of being defined by the refusal to choose between opposed identities” which not only enables double consciousness to refute “an essentially chronological plot of identity” but which also constitutes “its peculiar ontological strength.” (304)

is, particularly in its ComIntern-influenced versions, an emphatically international, and not global, vision. First, race, even when called “black,” for Du Bois is never simply a question of color: it invariably gives rise to a racial culture, and hence something approaching a proto-national form. In Du Bois’s reading, “black India” is a racial culture that finally receives a national form; so, too, yellow Japan, whose accomplishments accord it a leadership status both in his essays and his novel.<sup>35</sup>

Second, Du Bois’s internationalism consistently excludes white peoples in its vision of what global collaboration can be. Dark Princess is acutely aware of the dangers of certain types of internationalism, perhaps (all of?) those involving white peoples, for these are simply unequal power relations, disguised racism, and the continuation of empire by other means. Kautilya’s pity-and-love affair with the white British amputee, Captain the Honorable Malcolm Fortesque-Dodd, is partially facilitated by the India Office in London, which engages with Kautilya regarding the “new status” India is about to assume. “Should India emerge with new freedom and self-determination as a country entirely separate in race, religion, and politics from Mother England? Or as one allied by interest and even intermarriage?” (238) This internationalism is revealed to be “a more refined term to prolong the evils of colonialism indefinitely under the guise of a

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<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, his 1906 essay in *Collier’s Weekly*, “The Colour Line Belts the World,” in which the Japanese victory over Russia is a world-historical portent for all darker peoples: “The magic of the word ‘white’ is already broken, and the Color Line in civilization has been crossed in modern times as it was in the great past. The awakening of the yellow races is certain. That the awakening of the brown and black races will follow in time, no unprejudiced student of history can doubt.” The essay is reprinted in Du Bois, Mullen and Watson, W.E.B. Du Bois on Asia : Crossing the World Color Line 34.

universal humanism," a concern that "extreme nationalists" of the period had about all internationalism whatsoever. (Viswanathan 326) The fraud is unmasked in Du Bois, however, not through material consequences but through the revelation of racism, particularly anti-miscegenation racism. Kautilya overhears her fiancé's conversation with an English Marchioness, a moment of ideology overheard or intercepted that she then relates to Matthew and to us readers:

"Malcolm, I can't bear the thought of you mating with a nigger.'  
"Hell! I'm mating with a throne and a fortune. The darky's a mere makeweight.'" (243)

If Souls displays a cosmopolitan form and a doubling plot of spatiotemporal simultaneity, Dark Princess shows not border-crossing but international solidarity, wherein simultaneity is subordinated to the drives of an eschatological or messianic modality. Whereas in Souls it is "the feminized and fantasized geographies" of Ethiopia and Egypt that provide the sites of restoration for "a masculine racial psyche split on the terrain of national belonging" (310), in Dark Princess the spaces of extra-national restoration have come into the United States, quite literally, through the travels of feminized and eroticized figural forms.<sup>36</sup> This element is also part of Du Bois's political pedagogy, for Dark Princess does not simply narrate political fantasy but also elucidates

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<sup>36</sup>"In the emblematic case of double consciousness, the travails of a masculine racial psyche split on the terrain of national belonging ("an American, a Negro") are set within the feminized and fantasized geographies of Ethiopia the Shadowy and Egypt the Sphinx as places of recuperation and restoration. Egypt the Sphinx is both a racial memory, a form of time that returns the African American subject to its forgotten origin, and a distinctly diasporic space, a reminder that for some subjects it is only by going outside the national, only by inhabiting alternative kinds of space and time, that they can lay claim to a nation that variously anteriorises or exteriorizes them on the forward-moving line of progress. Cooppan, "The Double Politics of Double Consciousness: Nationalism and Globalism in *the Souls of Black Folk*," 310.

how to work against racism nationally and inter-nationally, at once. Unlike the memory-migrancy detours of Souls, the aspiring Du Boisean no longer needs to leave America to change the world outside America; as Kautilya educates Matthew and the reader:

“The black belt of the Congo, the Nile, and the Ganges reaches up by way of Guiana, Haiti, and Jamaica, like a red arrow up into the heart of white America. Thus I [Kautilya] see a mighty synthesis: you can work in Africa and Asia right here in America if you work in the Black Belt.” (W. E. B. Du Bois Dark Princess: A Romance 286)

Du Bois’s interest in internationalism, however one reads it into the trajectory of his work, is related to getting away from the inevitable, hateful, fatal binarism of the U.S. black-white struggle, which in Souls threatens to breed not resistance but paranoid projection.<sup>37</sup> He generalizes the utility he finds in internationalist progressivism to an anticolonial nationalist project as well. Swadeshi (literally, ‘of one’s own country’), with its project of affirming nationalism through a turning inwards to a naturalized national culture, must always fail, because internationalism, for Du Bois, is the space for the emergence of nationalist self-consciousness, providing the only forum for the recognition, and hence emergence into subjecthood, that anti-imperialist nationalism, swadeshi or otherwise, craves. Kautilya tells Matthew, quite late in the text, “In vain I joined Mahatma Gandhi and tried to force the boycott over my land. My people were too poor and ignorant. Yet slowly we advanced and there came to us visitors from

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<sup>37</sup> “The Negro dimly personifies in the white man all his ills and misfortunes; if he is poor, it is because the white man seizes the fruit of his toil; if he is ignorant, it is because the white man gives him neither time nor facilities to learn; and, indeed, if any misfortune happens to him, it is because of some hidden machinations of ‘white folks’.” W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (New York: Dover, 1994) 95.

Egypt, Japan, China, and at last from Russia...." (Dark Princess 246). Gandhi here serves as metonym for the entirety of the Indian independence movement, and the boycott's spirit of swadeshi self-reliance becomes something that must be enforced over a land, a land containing "poor and ignorant" people. That which is "in vain," then, might be the attempt to self-recognize through the leadership of a nationalist visionary, for such attempts to attain an anticolonially posited self-consciousness cannot but fail (though a modicum of advancement is found, at the end of the passage quoted above, through the arrival of international, and philosophically internationalist, visitors). Locked, as an emergent subject, into the quest for recognition, the anticolonial nationalism that looks inwards, that seeks self-consciousness through self-sufficiency and self-affirmation, seems to move towards the subjectionist logics of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, perhaps through a dualism of the leaders and the "poor and ignorant," in which the force of the boycott's imposition becomes the actual route towards national self-consciousness. This would be entirely in keeping, of course, with the Subaltern Studies school of historiography, most obviously in Ranajit Guha's argument that the Swadeshi movement did in fact rely upon violent and caste-ridden forms of mobilization and discipline.<sup>38</sup> That the bourgeois nationalism of Indian anticolonialism relied upon a

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<sup>38</sup> In keeping with the Subaltern Studies approach, Guha revises and dismisses the myth of passive peasant involvement through charismatic leadership; in another stroke, moreover, he reworks the mythos of Swaraj and Swadeshi to expose the ways in which they drew upon earlier, preexisting, and explicitly disavowed (by the nationalist leadership) forms of collective thinking, mobilization, and control. Guha, Dominance without Hegemony. This vein of discussion is extended further, with specific reference to Gandhi, in Shahid



contradictory and vexed relation to the subaltern is by now well known; what remains to be seen, however, is what the imagined alternatives might have entailed. To take seriously Du Bois's depiction of Swadeshi in Dark Princess is also to wonder whether engaged internationalism might have avoided the problems which Dark Princess imagined and the Subaltern Studies collective investigated.

In Du Bois's theorization, when the anticolonial search for selfhood is pulled outside of a nationalism that looks inwards, it opens itself up to a multivalent space of affirmation and recognition, in which the dynamics of force, of the master-slave, are replaced by an expansionary and interpersonal sense of national self. The "visitors from Egypt, Japan, China, and at last from Russia" (Dark Princess 246) confirm the emergent anticolonial nation through their visit, for they materialize without any prior notification and into that India of the novel which is marked by neither quotidian time nor historical change (Ahmad). Moreover, through the offering of hospitality, the space of one's residence, even when it is the space of one's oppression, becomes articulated and marked as home (see Derrida and Dufourmantelle).

This is, moreover, what makes Matthew the most suitable mate for Kautilya, for the need that such internationalism attempts to meet is not one for tactical solidarity, a strength of numbers gained through the forging of alliances among the darker races of the world, but for an assimilation that yields a new, regenerative, self, outside the binary

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Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma," Selected Subaltern Studies, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

struggle of oppressor and oppressed. This is why Kautilya must reject the “King in India” who “willed to be Maharajah of Bwodpur. He would lead Swaraj in India. He would unite India and China and Japan” (Dark Princess 268), for the uniting of nations is here not a question of leadership or self-rule (Swaraj), but of regenerative, re-productive assimilation. After all, her first child-husband, “poor puppet of England,” was murdered, a crime she first blamed on the English only to realize that “he had probably been murdered by the Indian fanatics of Swaraj... although I realized that perhaps Englishmen with ulterior motives had egged them on.” (243) In Dark Princess, Swaraj is simply the flip side of empire, and both or either of them are out to kill you.

This might be the internationalist emphasis that Gilroy celebrates when he argues that Dark Princess, when “Read as a beginning rather than an ending, ... offers an image of hybridity and intermixture that is especially valuable because it gives no ground to the suggestion that cultural fusion involves betrayal, loss, corruption, or dilution.” (Gilroy 144) Gilroy contends that Dark Princess “expresses the upsurge of anti-imperial struggles during the 1920s” and that it offers up a politically important vision, “a history we would do well to recover and reassess today.” (144) Yet, in Dohra Ahmad’s reading, “Gilroy's reading appears uncomplicatedly sanguine” (779), for she diagnoses both Orientalism and heterosexism in Du Bois’s world romance.

While Orientalism is a particular kind of discursive transfiguration (as are the white-publishers-books Du Bois attacks in “Criteria of Negro Art”), such transfiguration

in the service of the dominant converts its referents—Indian princesses or Uncle Toms—into stable categories for the coherence of the hegemonic. Dark Princess, in contrast, transfigures Indian anticolonialism in ways that, while frequently in keeping with the inaccuracies of dominant Orientalism, are leveraged towards *not* a stable ideology but instead towards a generative and regenerated U.S. based antiracist activism, suturing instability into those transfigurations as a consequence. To think of intercultural exchange as transfiguration and not translation, moreover, gets us *away* from the task of the critic or commentator as one of decoding the failures of what, following Derrida or Levinas, is a necessarily impossible encounter to begin with. Transfiguration as a paradigm asks us to think, first, about how and what that transfigurative (and perhaps necessarily instrumental) intercultural exchange makes possible, and then, through the (perhaps many) mistranslations of such an encounter—its inaccuracies, its scandals, even perhaps its tendency toward the “hegemony of the homogenous” (Derrida 40)—what such an encounter reveals.

My reading of Dark Princess, consequently, understands its internationalism as more than the simple substitution or enlargement of a national vision. I disagree thus with an interpretation like Homi Bhabha’s, in which the “twoness” of the white American and the black American have simply been replaced by the “twoness” of

Matthew Townes and Princess Kautilya: the concerns of the international in Du Bois do not simply replace, in perfect substitution, the problems of the national.<sup>39</sup>

My argument is also in direct contrast to that of Claudia Tate's, who, noting the physical wearing down of Kautilya through her experience of proletarian labor, claims that "Kautilya's noble endeavor to learn the effects of labor exploitation has transformed her into the emphatically dark—black—woman...." (Tate 187) To simply see Kautilya always in terms of a black woman whom she is either replacing or becoming is, I would argue, to work against the fragile logic of juxtaposed brown and blackness, of Indian-ness and American-ness, that the novel is working to achieve. It is also, and perhaps more problematically, to enforce a simplified United-States-ness on what is, for Du Bois, an emphatically global vision.

Tate continues, in her otherwise provocative essay, to willfully import the rather specific structures of United States racialisations. Reading the ways in which Kautilya is described, she argues that "By using as uplift symbols ideal dark women who are, in actuality, golden-hued, he undermines his argument on black exceptionalism. Kautilya's portrait exacerbates this problem." (Tate 180) In a move that reduces Kautilya's Indian flesh to simply a version of whiteness, Tate claims, astonishingly, that Du Bois's desire is akin to that discussed in Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks, but that Du Bois "abandons

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<sup>39</sup> For Bhabha, importantly, what he reads as a simple substitution is deeply problematic: "It is difficult, at first, not to perceive something anomalous, even a little absurd, in the symbolic "twoness" of Townes and Princess Kautilya, especially in the race-man's rapturous celebration of the Princess's aristocracy of culture and custom." Homi Bhabha, "Introduction," Dark Princess: A Romance (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) xxvii.

the white object of desire because white patriarchy uses perverse versions of this scenario to justify lynching." (Tate 182) In my reading, however, Indianness is neither the substitution and rejection of an earlier white double (Bhabha) nor the phantasmatic displacement of a continuing desire for whiteness (Tate). Neither mourning's replacement object nor disavowal's fetish, brown here works in concert with both black *and* white as a third, mutable, malleable term, a difficult to delineate alterity that offers up new possibilities for color line conundrums.

The questions of this transfigured alterity, this odd elsewhere deployed in progressivist thought, is of course particularly applicable to the 'brown' space of India, in the terrain of global literary production, and to the 'brown' peoples of the world, in terms of the racial dynamics of the United States.<sup>40</sup> The importance, then, of the transfiguring work that Du Bois does is one that is particularly resonant in our current context, and particularly for U.S. based progressivism. To take Dark Princess seriously is to argue that we need more, and not less, instrumental transfiguration, if the politics of U.S. progressive internationalism are going to avoid totalizing homogenization. For in transfiguring the irreducible alterity of brownness, elsewhere or right at home, the U.S.

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<sup>40</sup> The literature on this is legion. For a continuity model of colonial and postcolonial literary preoccupations with the subcontinent, see Suleri, The Rhetoric of English India. For a discussion of global literary production in the postcolonial context, see Timothy Brennan, At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

In the context of the United States, the phantasmatic work of the brown body has been discussed by, among others, José Esteban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position," Signs 31.3 (2006), Hiram Perez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!," Social Text 84-85.23.3-4 (2005), and Richard Rodriguez, Brown: The Last Discovery of America (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

imagination, so strongly compelled by a black-white binary, will falter, will fail—and may reveal what can be done in the process.

The work of such internationalism is the transfiguration of the other into the (politically) useful, both through the production of fiction and through the fictional characters created therein. The conversion that I see happening in this text is most evident in the character of Kautilya, for the referencing of various figures in her trajectory places her in a directly transfigurative mode relative to the Indian anticolonial material to which Du Bois is responding.<sup>41</sup> Kautilya's domestic program, for example, is almost identical to that of the Arya Samaj, the religious reform movement of Du Bois's friend and mentor Lala Lajpat Rai, particularly in its stated position on religion – "I wanted to clean the slate and go back to the ancient simplicity of Brahma" – but also in its sociopolitical efforts: "We mitigated the power of the castes.... We contrived to spend the major part of the income of the state for the public welfare.... We began to establish public schools and to send scholars to foreign lands." (Dark Princess 245) Kautilya repeatedly uses the phrase "young India," the title of a key journal founded by Rai and run by Gandhi, to speak of a vibrant anticolonial movement in India, and her personal trajectory and political vision reference and transfigure two other leading Indian

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<sup>41</sup> Du Bois's contemporaries were so struck by the figure of Kautilya that they searched for a real-time contemporary referent for the figure. Herbert Aptheker, for instance, conjectured that there was a woman at Fisk University, while Mary White Ovington claimed that Kautilya was based upon an Indian princess from the First Universal Races Congress in London in 1911. Regardless of the veracity or lack thereof of such claims, the logic of the novel operates through transfiguration of Indian historical materials—and the logic of Kautilya's name, with its obvious historical and mythic referent, takes this novel justly outside of the realist individual and into the allegorical frame of romance.

anticolonial leaders.<sup>42</sup> In her self-positioning away from the “extremists of Swaraj,” her labor organizing work with the Box-Makers Union, her proto-feminism, and her desire “to be the visible symbol of the power of New India” (Dark Princess 244), Kautilya transfigures the theosophist leader Annie Besant; and in her time in and relation to England, her work with an Indian ambulance corps, her dramatic and physically marked renunciation of privilege, and the attack upon her by an Indian soldier for betrayal, Kautilya transfigures the central figure of Gandhi.

Annie Besant, the white British theosophist who spent most of her life in India, was the founder of the Indian Home Rule League in Madras (now Chennai) in 1916, which, modeled on the Irish Home Rule League, envisaged self-determination within a benevolent British commonwealth. President of the Indian National Congress in 1917, Besant split with Gandhi and the majority of the Congress at the 1920 Congress in Lahore, arguing against the satyagraha strategy.<sup>43</sup> Besant had strong socialist credentials and labor organizing experience, especially in London in the matchworkers’ strike of 1888, which provides an interesting parallel to Kautilya’s work with the Box-Makers’ Union. A proponent of birth control, she also founded the Women’s Indian Association in 1917, and she was, moreover, one of the attendees of the 1911 Universal Races

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<sup>42</sup> Founded by Lajpat Rai in 1917, Young India was under the editorial control of Gandhi from March 1919.

<sup>43</sup> “Satyagraha” is used by Gandhi (and others) to refer both to the movements that used this strategy (e.g. the Salt Satyagraha) and a certain kind of political philosophy, which Bose and Jalal gloss as “a quest for truth through mass political activity.” Satya means truth; graha means firmness. Gandhi insistently distinguished his non-violent resistance strategy, “satyagraha,” from passive resistance, which he associated with the suffragettes; satyagraha produced an element of active disciplinary resistance, as well as what he described as a commitment to truth above all.

Conference in London, along with Du Bois and Gandhi. Kautilya's character is a clear transfiguration of Besant, yet for Du Bois's purposes much of this material has to be decisively transfigured: Kautilya, after all, is an Indian princess, not a socialist British woman. Moreover, white (Western) women played a significant figurative (and sometimes practical) role for early twentieth century Indian nationalism; Parama Roy, for instance, has argued that, in its more masculinist (and usually Hindu) manifestations, Indian nationalism required the recognition of western women for the liberal-but-Indian syncretism for its particular dialectic of nationalist legitimacy. (114) In Roy's analysis, "Of all the figures in the colonial scene—western man, Indian man, western woman, and Indian woman—it seems that it is only the western woman whose identity is available—for the Indian man—as relatively open, mobile, malleable." (Roy 123) Whereas Indian (nationalist) anticolonialism turns to the third term of western woman for the synthesis of its East-meets-West dialectic, Du Bois's U.S. (anti-racist) anticolonialism turns to the third term of *Indian* woman—most precisely, the beautiful and self-sacrificing princess of the Orient—for the sublation of its white-black opposition.

What, moreover, are we to make of this submerged reference to Annie Besant, given Du Bois's oft-remarked *lack* of references to his African American female contemporaries? His notorious use of Anna Julia Cooper's words in "The Damnation of Women" section of Darkwater (1920) reduces her, through the lack of citation, to an



anonymous and undifferentiated figure, even as the essay draws upon African American feminists like Cooper for its power. Joy James, for instance, has argued that “With no attributed source, his citation allows Cooper to disappear as her words appear. ... Her anonymity allows Du Bois to appear as a transgender representative for the entire vilified and oppressed race.” (James 79) In Dark Princess, however, it is not Du Bois but Princess Kautilya who emerges as this “transgender representative” for the entire *Indian* race. Both the white feminist socialist British woman and the impeccably, anachronistically, Indian father-of-the-nation; both “Kautilya,” master theorist of statecraft, and the titular “Dark Princess” of the royal house of Bowdipur: Princess Kautilya can do it all, but only by simultaneously obscuring the historical figure, Annie Besant, who forms the “real” woman behind this transfigured character.

Besant is already, of course, a “translated woman”; so, too, is Du Bois’s Gandhi, who emphatically formulates himself in South Africa, only thereafter becoming active in the subcontinent. The migrancy of these figures, their already international trajectories, seems to make them particularly available for transfiguration: their historical personas have already been transfigured by the variety of geopolitical contexts they have inhabited, and the transfiguration of them into internationalist fiction is only another step in a process already underway.

They are also, perhaps, available to the “rule of juxtaposition,” which first appears in Darkwater (1920): “a dual, even contradictory positing that characterizes Du

Bois's writings—the simultaneous juxtaposition of issues of race, gender, and sexuality and the submerging of their express connection.” (Gillman and Weinbaum "Introduction: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Politics of Juxtaposition" 2-3)<sup>44</sup> The “rule of juxtaposition” might be understood to suggest “the creation of an enforced intimacy, an antagonistic proximity, that defines the color line as it runs across the uncivil society of the nation.” (Bhabha) For Gillman and Weinbaum, it is also the process through which Du Bois can arrange certain bodies and concerns—gender, in their instance—next to the color line instead of, perhaps, anterior to it. The principle of juxtaposition is both an element of Du Bois's polyphony and his politics: accordingly, they argue, “Du Bois scholars must practice ‘the politics of juxtaposition’ as well” (10), examining his texts not in isolation but instead looking along the borders and the interstices.<sup>45</sup>

Following such a logic of reading, we might wager that Kautilya figures not simply a conversion of Indian material but a “half-tone,” a juxtaposition of the Indian anticolonialists he omits and never names (Gandhi, Besant), with the black American women leaders whom he regularly obliterates as well. The latter, of course, is most apparent in the character of Sara Andrews, Matthew's first, frigid, light-skinned wife,

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<sup>44</sup> This is “a politics of juxtaposition grounded in a form of combination that acknowledges simultaneity and association, and yet elects not to work through how it is that connections among the movements for the ‘uplift of women,’ for racial justice, and for peace might be conceptualized or produced, or how black women might be included, as a group, within the analysis.” (3) Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, “Introduction: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Politics of Juxtaposition,” *Next to the Color Line*, eds. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> “Textual meaning is thus neither structured by nor aligned with a single genre (analytical essay or poetry, for instance), but rather resides in the nebulous space among genres and styles.” Gillman and Weinbaum, “Introduction: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Politics of Juxtaposition,” 10.

who is castigated by the novel for her frigid liberalism and her desire for assimilation: it is Sara, crucially, and not Kautilya, who can pass as white. This would lead, in one version, to the conflationary model advocated in Claudia Tate's influential reading of Du Bois's overdetermined mothers. A reading practice of juxtaposition, however, would refuse the conflation of Sara and Kautilya into a single model of female desirability and would read, instead, for what Kautilya is juxtaposed *against*—the frigid African American social climber and bourgeois liberal, Sara Andrews—as well as juxtaposed *with*—the white woman Besant and the brown man Gandhi—in order to produce her particular figuration.<sup>46</sup>

In Gillman and Weinbaum's analysis, however, the strategy of juxtaposition creates a problematic imaginary in Du Bois's 1920 Darkwater, for "in imagining a politics of combination but refusing to articulate bodies and discourses, it is not just that women disappear from view, but that 'black' is uncoupled from 'women'—understood as a vocal, plural category." (19) In the decoupling of "black" and "women" in Dark Princess, however, what becomes possible and legible is a femininity defined in terms of color and racialisation but not reducible to the question of blackness: "women," or rather "woman" (since the solidarity of many women is not imagined in this novel, either) in Dark Princess becomes a term through which a variety of anticolonial political positions can be processed, juxtaposed, and worked through.

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<sup>46</sup> I use "figuration" here in the Jamesonian sense: the representation of abstract political conditions into characters, through and by which a broader social consciousness is both produced and ascertained

Kautilya thus can be read not simply as a “Dark Besant” but as a fragile moment of transfigurative vision in the Christian sense, in which the multiple personas she transfigures, including Besant, accede in Du Bois’s American eyes to some world-historical significance. My objective in discussing Kautilya as a figure of transfiguration and, perhaps, juxtaposition, is not to reclaim Du Bois in general, or even Dark Princess, for a feminist canon, a pro-feminist agenda, or even a proto-feminist consciousness. The Du Boisean imaginary, both antiracist and anticolonial, is irrevocably gendered — which is also not to say, however, that the ways in which Du Bois “assumed and privileged a discourse of black masculinity” led to simple and predictable results. (Carby 235) In Hazel Carby’s reading, for instance,

Gender mediates Du Bois’s presentation of the relation between race, nation, and a fully participatory citizenship for black people. Integral to the “problem” of simultaneously being black and being American is coming into manhood, and it is the latter that is the most vulnerable to attack. (Carby 254)

Carby reads Souls to find, first, the limits of the female figurations in that work: although “the heart of the first section ” is “organized as a primarily female symbolic space,” the female figures – Josie, Atlanta – are hopeless and overdetermined. (Carby 244) Consequently, “the future of Du Bois’s imagined black community is to be determined by the nature of the struggle among men over the bodies of women.” (Carby 248) Not only are women both figurally important to Souls and precluded from the

concept of double consciousness, but also that certain kinds of black men —most notably, Booker T. Washington —are excluded as well.<sup>47</sup>

The second impetus of Carby's reading, however, pivots around the question of sexuality. In Souls, she argues, "Du Bois constantly replaces and represses images of sexual desire (in his chapter on Atlanta) with evocations of a New England work ethic" (Carby 246) The only sexual congress, consequently, that makes a clear and unedited appearance in Souls is the

act of sexual compromise by Du Bois's anonymous figure of the black mother, which contributes to the black man's failure to become a man, [and which] is deliberately situated in the narrative of Reconstruction so as to parallel the Act of Compromise of 1877 between the northern and southern states.... Each act of compromise renders the nation impotent, unable and unwilling to fully emancipate the black man. (Carby 260)

Yet if the sex politics of the 1903 Souls speaks of blackwomen's sexuality as tragically compromised, enfeebled and enfeebling, the problematic blackwoman's sexuality of the 1928 Dark Princess is marked by not compromise but by frigidity: excessive

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<sup>47</sup> "The process of gendering at work in The Souls of Black Folk distinguishes not only between concepts of masculine and feminine subject positions but makes distinctions within his definition of masculinity itself." (252) Most clearly evident in his ridiculing of Booker T. Washington, the logic of manhood in Souls is unforgiving to those who fail:

Sycophancy and selling out to commercialism are cited as evidence of a stunted or deformed manhood, a masculine style incompatible with the incorporation of the race into the modern nation-state. Because Du Bois makes his narrative of the transition from male adolescence and immaturity to full manhood and maturity so entirely dependent upon becoming an intellectual, Washington's standing as an intellectual and as a race leader is challenged at the same time as his masculinity is undermined. (261)

It is also, crucially, misogynist in its final implications, for "When Washington mimics the speech and ideals of commercialism, he becomes the metaphorical equivalent of the black mother (or the black female prostitute) who succumbs to the lust of white men." Hazel Carby, "The Souls of Black Men," Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W.E.B. Du Bois, eds. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum (2007) 261.

respectability and inadequate sensuality.<sup>48</sup> Matthew's (first) wife, Sara, is a light-skinned black American whose interest in bourgeois respectability and liberalism's logics of power correspond to her frigidity, sterility, and incapacity for sensual love.<sup>49</sup>

Claudia Tate, in her influential psychoanalytic reading of Du Bois's work, has argued that the language of "Criteria of Negro Art" (1926) signals a shift in Du Bois's oeuvre, indicating the moment at which he is "abandoning the public arena of social protest for the private domain of erotic pleasure" and "disavowing the efficacy of any propaganda "stripped" of art and "silent" on desire and pleasure. " (Tate 152) Du Bois's work, she argues,

suggests that the public satisfaction of racial equality is connected and somewhat analogous to the private pleasure of eroticism, for eros and polity are mutually satisfying. By unconsciously instilling eroticism within his understanding of propaganda, Du Bois complicates his initial equation between art and propaganda by including passion and its gratification. (Tate 153)

Tate calls for the validity of individual desire in the context of black American fiction, yet she castigates Dark Princess's attempts to incorporate such individuated libidinal

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<sup>48</sup> My awkward use of "blackwoman" and "blackwomen" here is to note the points at which, in exception to what Gillman and Weinbaum see in Du Bois's work more generally, the terms "black" and "woman" are not uncoupled but might be seen as working in a single position. To do so as a single term, despite the awkwardness, is to avoid both intersectionality and juxtaposition, aiming for conjoining instead – and a possibly unnecessary neologism. Other suggestions are most welcome.

<sup>49</sup> "It is not simply that Sara is uninterested in love and its physical expressions, but that she is insensible to an entire continuum of sensual pleasures that the novel puts at the center of a global political vision, a vision that includes the body in its fullest expressions." Michele Elam and Paul C. Taylor, "Du Bois's Erotics," Next to the Color Line, eds. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota, 2007) 225.

drives.<sup>50</sup> Finding the novel to be a ludicrous failure (159), she argues that Du Bois's "rapport with Dark Princess is a very personal one that the reader at best can only partly share." (Tate 195)

Among Tate's many criticisms of the novel, it might be the generic ones that most concern us here: "Dark Princess turns from social realism to romance, from community enthusiasm to individual desire, from broad political objectives to narcissistic gratification. ... the controlling force in this text is not reason, God, or activist labor but unquestionably erotic desire." (Tate 191) It is as though erotic desire as a force for political and social transformation must necessarily, in such an understanding, equate to individualism and narcissistic gratification, a turning away from "reason, God, or activist labor" – a misreading that may not be supported by the novel itself.<sup>51</sup> If anything, the energies of this romance novel aim to knit together erotic desire, figured in

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<sup>50</sup> "U.S. reviewers, scholars, and readers have routinely understood black novels as expressions of racial politics even when such a formulation earns reproach. Yet this audience has celebrated the highly individualistic portraits of desire in white literature....while expecting desire in black textual production to be defined by and subsumed within the political ambitions of the black masses." Tate, "Race and Desire: *Dark Princess: A Romance*," 160.

<sup>51</sup> Tate in one section argues that the novel fails because it aims to hold a number of contradictory positions: First, it inscribes class ambivalence by appealing to the solidarity of the peoples of color with bourgeois and aristocratic leadership. Second, the novel attempts to erect black superiority while also venerating European art and music. Third, Du Bois's glorification of blackness is compromised by his enraptured depiction of the golden-skinned princess as the novel's ideal love object. ... the magical account and the Orientalized veiling of the dark princess are ultimately inhospitable to the novel's propagandist intent. Tate, "Race and Desire: *Dark Princess: A Romance*," 195.

The first allegation, of "class ambivalence," might be applied to Du Bois's work somewhat generally, particularly in its earlier manifestations – and, in the context of Dark Princess, even to Du Bois's vision of ComIntern possibilities for revolution. The second claim, I would argue, is both applicable to Du Bois's general aesthetic commitments and simultaneously disproven by some of his generic decisions – in the context of Dark Princess, the choice of "A Romance" is a deauthorising move in many respects. The third claim, finally, I hope, is adequately addressed and redressed in the body of this chapter.

the individual character, with larger trajectories and typographies of the social: in the melodramatic mode, for instance, which Dark Princess could be argued to inhabit, the figuring of individualized erotic desire is also the figuring of good and evil, a making visible of ethical values in a post-secular *and* post-lapsarian world.<sup>52</sup>

The body or the erotic is not in Dark Princess simply a replacement for or an evasion of real politics; it is itself the site of political transformation and practice. Unlike Booker T. Washington, Du Bois is not focused upon the black American body as the site of labor, but he is certainly invested in the body and embodiment as the site through which the American Negro subject is corporeally constituted. as In Roderick Ferguson's analysis, the discourse of "W. E. B. Du Bois" works as an evaluative frame for African American intellectual practice, and it is one that "links intellectual and political agency with the corporealization of the intellectual." (Ferguson 271) "Du Bois as discourse" stands for an ideal of black masculinity, working not "through the suppression of racialized gender and sexuality, but through the articulation of racialized gender and sexuality as modes of agency." (Ferguson 275)

In his stringent critique, Dark Princess in particular presents "a radical black heterosexual masculinity as the critique of the gender and sexual itineraries of liberalism" (278) and "makes the achievement of modern subject status a political and (hetero) sexual endeavor." (Ferguson 283). Despite Dark Princess's refusal to close with

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<sup>52</sup> For an analysis of specifically U.S. racial melodramas, see Linda Williams, Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).



the marriage ending, Ferguson finds the heterosexism (and patriarchy) of the novel to be a decisively normative and norm-instantiating operation, instead of the transgressive rebellion against liberal governmentality that the novel imagines itself to be undertaking. "Marriage, according to the novel, is a technique of liberal governmentality that gives legitimacy to black middle-class efforts to assimilate into liberal democracy, and acquire power according to its rules of engagement." (284)

To understand what Ferguson quite reasonably perceives as a regressive, conservative heterosexism at the heart of Du Bois's radical anti-racist vision, we need not only the generic frame of romance but also the modality of the novel's language: that is, melodrama. In using both romance and melodrama to describe the novel, I am drawing on the distinction between genre and mode. Romance speaks to the ways in which the novel proclaims itself and lays claim to a category and tradition; it is a genre "elaborat[ing] a second order reality, in which verisimilitude depends on the internal rules of the particular genre in question." (Gledhill "Signs of Melodrama" 215)

Melodrama is the mode in which the novel organizes its meanings and the ways in which it understands the production of truth in the reality of the existing social order; it is the mode of the novel, "a culturally conditioned mode of perception and aesthetic articulation." (227) Melodrama is not a genre, because "Genre is first and foremost a boundary phenomenon" (221), and melodrama, as "a form founded on plagiarism" (225), is not a singular genre but instead "a genre-producing machine," "capable of

summoning up and putting into place different kinds of audience" (227). It is also, importantly, "a modality, understood as a culturally conditioned mode of perception and aesthetic articulation." (Gledhill "Rethinking Genre" 227)

In what is arguably the foundational theorization of melodrama, Peter Brooks has argued that the melodrama works to saturate the banality of everyday life with meaning and moral significance: the luxurious rugs of Kautilya and Matthew's love-nest, for instance, become the indices of a better, fuller social order. Instead of claiming the realm of reality, melodrama lays claim to the domain of truth, "using the things and gestures of the real world, of social life, as kinds of metaphors that refer us to the realm of spiritual reality and latent moral meanings. Things cease to be merely themselves, gestures cease to be merely tokens of social intercourse whose meaning is assigned by a social code; they become the vehicles of metaphors whose tenor suggests another kind of reality." (Brooks 9) Following such a logic, moreover, brings us to the impossibilities of reading the heterosexual romance plot of Dark Princess as though it were, as in a realist novel, indexical of heterosexual romance in the "real world" – or, even, in a realist world. If the characters of this romance represent types, and not representative individuals, and if the melodramatic mode of this novel claims the domain of truth, and not reality, then this novel's "radical heterosexuality" might deserve a less literal

reading than Ferguson accords it.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, while I am sympathetic to Ferguson's reading, I am not sure if the assertive heterosexuality of the novel's protagonist would mark the text as heterosexist tout court.

This operation of melodrama in culturally conditioning perception and articulation, is useful as we think about, if you will, a "radically heterosexual" or "radically reproductive" text like Dark Princess where reproduction is envisaged as *oppositional* to liberal governmentality and state-enforced normativity. What would it mean to invest so heavily in heterosexual reproduction as utopian political possibility, radically separate from the false and sterile possibilities of U.S. liberal governmentality, when heterosexuality tout court would be understood, in most if not all queer critique, to be intrinsic to and inseparable from liberalism and its regimes of normativity?

Alys Eve Weinbaum's persuasive reading of Dark Princess gestures towards but does not incorporate this melodramatic modality in the characterizations of the novel.<sup>54</sup> Du Bois's novel casts "the fecund 'black All-Mother,' a dark racialized vessel of consciousness and belonging" as both the antithesis of "the sterile light-skinned woman" and "the source of racial globality – a form of international kinship that

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<sup>53</sup> To draw attention to the melodramatic mode, moreover, is in itself a feminist or at least anti-sexist move, for "The relative invisibility of melodrama today is due to the rise of realism as a touchstone of cultural worth and to its ghettoisation as a women's' form." Christine Gledhill, "Signs of Melodrama," Stardom: Industry of Desire, ed. Christine Gledhill (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 207.

<sup>54</sup> Weinbaum's argument is importantly one that looks at a continuum of Du Bois's work, examining the shifting invocations of what she terms the race/reproduction bind throughout the course of his work and life. Consequently, the discursive environment in which this figuration of racial kinship operates may be somewhat different from the climate—of contemporaries, of international interlocutors, and of generic companions—in which I wish to situate the work here.

encompasses all the darker peoples of the world, and constitutes a refutation of U.S. racial nationalism.” (Weinbaum 208) Given that the dynamics of “reproductive racism” relied upon “the reproduction of racial kinship as central to the self-conception of the national majority” (Weinbaum 189), Du Bois’s turn to racial kinship is for her a decisive shift from the anti-essentialising impulses of the “On the Passing of the First-Born” section in Souls.<sup>55</sup> In Souls, Du Bois “allegorizes the violence of the ideology of racial reproduction by refusing to construct the maternal body as the source of racial identity” (197), but in Dark Princess, he wants to lay claim “to the reproductive order of things.” (205) In the United States “black maternity has been persistently constructed as antithetical to national belonging” (188), a problem acknowledged and addressed in the more nation-focused argument of Souls. The Dark Princess, however, “can give her son to the brown world and the world to him, even though for the black mother in the United States such a proposition is unrealizable.” (Weinbaum 214) For Weinbaum, this constitutes, finally, a conservative recourse to reproduction as still “the motor of black belonging in the world,” for “even as Dark Princess succeeds in severing maternity from the logic of racial nationalism, it reinserts the black mother into a logic of internationalism.” (Weinbaum 215)

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<sup>55</sup> “On the Passing of the First Born” (Souls, 1903) proposes a “decisively antiessentialising” maternal-child bond, one “integrated into an alternative calculus of connection in which spiritual merging plays a far greater role than genealogical descent.” This “romanticized and at once nonbiological link” is so strong and so primary “that Du Bois’s paternity is expressed as maternally mediated.” Alys Eve Weinbaum, Wayward Reproductions : Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought, Next Wave (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) 195-6.

Interestingly, Weinbaum also sees Du Bois as “refusing a strict analogy between India and America, Pan-Africa and Pan-Asia,” and offering instead a shared structure of feeling, “a form of racial consciousness that connects all the world’s darker peoples into a single world-shaping force.” (Weinbaum 208) This is, I would argue, the more promising aspect of Weinbaum’s analysis, for whereas the polyphonic text of Souls may be more obviously anti-essentialist, the chosen modality of melodramatic romance does not, I would argue, imply in Dark Princess a simplistic turn towards literalist understandings of belonging and kinship through race/reproduction. We are not, emphatically not, cast into a world in which the black all-mother now operates as literal character instead of as metaphor; indeed, if anything, Matthew Townes’ mother (“Mamma Townes”?) is metaphoric and hyperbolic, romanticized to the extent that she operates nearly indistinguishably from Kautilya herself.<sup>56</sup>

Our radical race hero, Matthew Townes, is after all the quintessential melodramatic persona: “totally committed to living out his or her dominant desires, despite moral and social taboo or inter-personal conflict.” (Gledhill “Signs of Melodrama” 212) In romance as in melodrama, characters operate as types, not as individuals, and the ideology at work is not of liberal representation but perhaps of

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<sup>56</sup> This may be what Weinbaum is gesturing towards when she says that “Whereas Richard Wright cast the Negro as America’s metaphor, Du Bois cast the black mother as the world’s metaphor.” Weinbaum, Wayward Reproductions : Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought 209.

moral figuration, producing a “drama of pure psychic signs,” a “melodrama of psychology.” (Brooks 35)<sup>57</sup>

the personae of melodrama are typed in a different way and to a different end from the social typeage of the classic realist novel. In the latter, the accumulation of social detail around individualized characters serves to lead the reader from the individual outwards to the social network within which they take up their position as types. In melodrama this process is reversed. The emblematic types of melodrama lead not outward to society but inward to where social and ideological pressures impact on the psychic.... (Gledhill "Signs of Melodrama" 209)

Radical heterosexuals Matthew and Kautilya are not, following the logic of melodrama, types within a larger imagined world of radical and non-radical heterosexuals; they might be better understood as the fecundity and immanent futurity to which Du Bois was so committed, and through which the novel’s political promise proceeds. The temporality of narration becomes less and less realist, and more and more mythic, as and when Kautilya is pregnant, as and when she grows within her not only the messianic baby but also, and partly through her correspondence with Matthew, her messianic international vision.<sup>58</sup> This is perhaps what Alys Eve Weinbaum is suggesting when she argues that in Du Bois’s “epic reproductive process,” three types of

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<sup>57</sup> In melodrama, Brooks tells us, “the characters have no interior depth, there is no psychological conflict. It is delusive to seek an interior conflict, the “psychology of melodrama,” because melodrama exteriorizes conflict and psychic structure, producing instead what we might call the “melodrama of psychology.” What we have is a drama of pure psychic signs... that interest us through their clash, by the dramatic space created through their interplay, providing the means for their resolution. This space can resemble the structure of the mind, nearly in a Freudian sense, or a medium comparable to the dream text, but only because it works through the play of pure, exteriorized signs.” Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 35-36.

<sup>58</sup> Or, as Weinbaum puts it, “As the Black Belt wraps itself around the world, the black world develops enveloped in Kautilya’s womb.” Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions : Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* 213.

transformation are inextricable: “Kautilya’s transformation into a mother, the gestation of her child, and the dawning of her political consciousness of racial globality.”

(Weinbaum 213)

We might be better served by reading Matthew Townes as representative of moral and social conflict but through not an exemplary logic of representativeness but instead through a symbolic logic of psychological typification—even as the novel must invariably also respond to the realist preoccupations of other contemporary texts. Such a reading practice would respect and respond to “the tension between melodrama’s emblematic, non-psychological personae and its drive to realize in personal terms social and ethical forces,” understanding Dark Princess’s reproductive and heterosexual radicalism as radical because melodramatic conflict, not because social solution.

(Gledhill "Signs of Melodrama" 214) Melodrama saturates the material of ordinary life with meaning and significance, not the other way around: the banal stuff of heterosexual breeding becomes the fecund and naturalized horizon of radical racial possibility, not because reproduction *naturally* produces revolution but because the melodramatic modality works to invest it with the meaning it otherwise lacks: melodrama here saturates the heterosexual romance, thus betraying its banal realities, which is rather different from an already powerful heterosexuality saturating the politics to which Du Bois lays claim. This is, I would suggest, the upshot of Du Bois’s choosing melodrama and romance, instead of realism and the realist novel, for

If realism presumes the adequacy of given linguistic and cultural codes for understanding and representing reality, and modernism embraces the infinite regress of meaning in the self-reflexive play of the signifier, melodrama's rootedness in the real world, its urgent ideological mission to motivate ordinary lives, leads it into an opposing stance. Faced with the decentered self, the evasiveness of language, melodrama answers with excessive personalization, excessive expression. (Gledhill "Signs of Melodrama" 218)

The generation of "a better and truer self" finds its fulfillment in Dark Princess through (the birth of) Madhu Chandragupta Singh, the messianic boy child of the novel's triumphal ending, the gurgling, golden self that regenerates and incorporates both the brown and the black. Whereas this may not be the "better and truer self" of Souls, it is unmistakably a third term with regenerative, productive, potential—a third term that might help Du Bois to get away from the pessimism of his Souls vision of "two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." (2) This is, then, a model of regenerative reproduction, a new body/self, but also, perhaps, a new book/text to configure and transfigure its ideas: fascinatingly, the Princess's name is that of the (male) political theorist and author Kautilya (Chanakya, 350-283 B.C.E.), and the name of Dark Princess's messiah transfigures the name of Kautilya's protégé, the Maurya king Chandragupta (320-298 B.C.E.). Princess Kautilya, thus, might be thought of as producing a child/idea, or child-*as*-idea, a logic that the text explicitly rejects in its embracing of the world romance for its political project, but which is still put forth by its appellative choices and evokes what Vilashini Cooppan observes in her reading of Souls:



“The Afterthought's” equation of book and baby messianically converts Du Bois into a curious combination of race man and race mother, progenitor of his own version of the color line, stretching forward into the future of racial uplift and backward to his own ruptured maternal genealogy, in whose African origins lies the history of the race. (15)

This assimilative model avoids the dual trap of its binary heterosexual coupling, moreover, through the third-term frame of reproduction that Dark Princess develops and espouses. Much like the impulses behind Du Bois’s turn to internationalism more generally, reproduction here is not simply the continuation of a couple; since the Indian princess operates as a third term to the needs of U.S. black anti-oppression work, the reproductive move is generative but not of reproductive futurity per se. What seems to be at stake, instead, is a transfigurational model of inter-national collaboration, literally embodied in the messianic mixed-race babe, which makes possible different sorts of progressive fusions and alliances. The reproductive plot of Kautilya and Matthew’s pairing, for example, is one that crucially encompasses Matthew’s mother, and it is crucially contingent upon the child’s recognition not only by the father, Matthew, but also by a panoply of international visitors and religious figures that are conjured into being, here figuring a kind of reciprocal reproduction through which not only an infant but also a preacher, an ancient woman, and a variety of religious brown men are created. Reproduction, thus, as transfigurative production of international plurality, not as biological continuation of a heterosexual dyad.

The interracial love-child of the novel's climactic conclusion is messily and bombastically produced, and the temporality of political possibility invested in that figure is more strictly messianic than futuristic. The Dark Princess infant materializes neither the future nor the phallus for us this: child operates as political *solution*, not as melancholic horizon or mourning's substitution. This is not the reproductive investment in futurity that, for instance, Lee Edelman condemns, for the Dark Princess infant does not entice us to "to embrace our own futurity in the privileged form of the Child, to imagine each moment as pregnant... with a meaning whose presence would fill up the hole in the Symbolic..." (Edelman 16) And it does not simply or solely, as Claudia Tate has argued, work to affirm and celebrate "Matthew's masculine identity, and... masculine textuality by symbolizing the phallus—the child, indeed a son." (Tate 199) To take Du Bois's aesthetic and political internationalism seriously requires, instead, a reading of this child as more regenerative than reproductive, as political solution and political problem, not simply the restoration of a reassuringly normative structure at the end of Du Bois's embarrassingly erotic book. The internationalist romance offers fantasy as fantasy, and affirms the necessity of form-as-such, whether messianic boy-child or melodramatic novel, to an international politics simultaneously taking place through slower, more realist media such as conferences and periodicals. Du Bois's novel offers up the fantasy of political reproduction not simply to maintain a status quo, but to

transfigure us into Leftist international plurality, and out of what Weinbaum calls “the race/reproduction bind.”

The final scene of the novel is marked by not only polyphony but also disjunction, even as the language moves towards a lyrical “revolutionary sublime.”<sup>59</sup> The lyrical narration is consistent enough as we are shown Matthew and Kautilya’s reunion, and Matthew’s astonished introduction to their child; it starts to break up, however, as they are married by a “short black man” who reads from the seventh chapter of Revelation. The narrative breaks into disjointed dialogue, without speaker attribution; we then witness “the ancient woman,” presumably Matthew’s mother, perform a speech of ecstatic prayer, which suddenly devolves into a dialogue reported as “The Woman” and “The Man.” Finally, a “pageant” of men “in white with shining swords” emerges from the woods, from which three old men step forward and invoke Krishna, Buddha, and Allah. After all this prayer and ritual, the child is transfigured into “a thrill of delight; its little feet, curled petals; its mouth a kiss; its hands like waving prayers.” (311) It is this kiss-petal-prayer combination, and not a literal child, that is the fantasy of a future for anti-racist left internationalism. It is this disjointed and dialogical polyphony, and not the attempted equivalences of translation, that marks the internationalist coalition Du Bois configures. The internationalist romance offers fantasy as fantasy, and affirms the necessity of form-as-such, whether messianic boy-child or

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<sup>59</sup> “Du Bois often deployed an ecstatic or prophetic voice when describing the wonders of the Asian world, a kind of revolutionary sublime that seems to find its form, literally, in lyricism.” Mullen, “Introduction: Crossing the World Color Line,” xx.

melodramatic novel, to an international politics simultaneously taking place through slower realist media. This transfiguration is the romance's "thrill of delight": not what is, but what might be.

## 7. Conclusion: 1930, 2010

On March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi began a protest march from Sabarmati, his emphatically Indian ashram, to the Indian Ocean, across which he sailed from South Africa fifteen years before. On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1930, Gandhi raised a fistful of salt on Dandi beach, and an entire subcontinent, writers and non-writers alike, were fired by a symbolic imaginary which came to dominate both political and literary horizons of understanding. The 1930s and 1940s saw the rise of the "Mahatma novel" in Indian fiction, within which the character of Gandhi as Mahatma resolves political and narrative conundrums alike.<sup>1</sup> Dark Princess, too, is a sort of Gandhi novel, and Gëorg Lukács, of course, mistakenly believed that Ghare Baire was Rabindranath's Gandhi novel. Yet in neither novel does Gandhi appear explicitly, and in neither work does Gandhianism represent both the political solution and its conditions of possibility. After 1930, particularly with the start of the Civil Disobedience movement, Gandhi begins, in his unmistakable Indian nationalist incarnation, to figure both.

Imperialism may have always been the most common form of internationalist practice, and by the 1930s the brief moment of possibility for anti-imperial internationalism seems to be all but over. Within India, nationalist agitation began to fold in the impulses of internationalist movements like the Theosophical Society,

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<sup>1</sup> For a useful overview of the Mahatma novel and the Gandhi theme, see Leela Gandhi, "Novelists of the 1930s and 1940s," A History of Indian Literature in English, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

epitomized perhaps in Annie Besant's work with the Indian National Congress. What little internationalism remained into the 1930s and 1940s resembled the federated model of the United Nations, radically different from the modernist internationalism that came before. The cosmopolitan Mulk Raj Anand, for instance, published a novel in 1936 with an unusual trinity of places at the end: "Simla—S.S. *Viceroy of India*—Bloomsbury." Apposite enough for a man whose intellectual and personal affiliations and travels ranged from Bloomsbury salons to Gandhi's Sabarmati ashram, this novel, Untouchable, narrates the travails of an Indian "outcaste" (what we today would term Dalit) within a structure inspired by James Joyce's Ulysses and Gandhi's short story "Uka." Yet Untouchable reflects neither transfigurative acrobatics nor romantic fantasy. Realist in its narrative form, the text assimilates bits of Indian languages through citation and not, for instance, bivalency. In marked contrast, for instance, to the work of Cornelia Sorabji, Anand's text provides cultural footnotes. In dramatic distinction from Rabindranath Tagore's deployment of multiple linguistic orders, Anand's use of Indian language phrases is both translated and transliterated, paraphrased and contextualized. In this internationalist imaginary, languages interact but they do not interfere.

Anand's internationalism, in keeping with his historical moment, was one which articulated the national alongside the international. Untouchable, after all, begins with a colony, the outcastes' colony, which is "under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them." (Anand

Untouchable 9) Whereas the protagonists of Sorabji, Du Bois, and Rabindranath's fictions struggle to locate their own selfhood, Anand's protagonist Bakha plays with masquerade: decked in British clothes, he is an imperial mimic. Bakha, however, is not even Kipling's little Kim or atrocious Hurree Baboo, whose indulgences in masquerade oscillated through a foundational crisis of imperial anxieties about ontological standing under epistemological uncertainty. That moment of anxiety, it seems, has passed, and with it the imaginative possibilities engendered therein.

The particular nature of this novel can be contextualized in part against the changing background of literary politics in Britain; in contrast to the reception as a curiosity and exemplarity which greeted Rabindranath and Sorabji, Anand's relationship to Bloomsbury was far more integrated, exemplified of course in his friendship with E.M. Forster. Yet Anand's transnational and translational practice was frequently marked by communicative failure, whether with his modernist contemporaries or by his postcolonial readers today. Reprinted in a volume published sixty years later, Anand recounts intellectual and aesthetic conversations that consistently go awry.<sup>2</sup> With both the increasing presence and continued minoritisation of colonial writers, Anand became, in a sense, "caught both within and outside the frame of a British canon that sought both to define and to exclude him." (Nasta 10)

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<sup>2</sup> See his recollections of these interactions in Mulk Raj Anand, Conversations in Bloomsbury (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1981).

Anand's work can be contextualized further within a socialist internationalism which found its materialization in the organization of domestic cultural politics. This is epitomized in the Indian context by the establishment of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) in 1936, of which Anand was a founding member. Explicitly adhering to the Popular Front program of the ComIntern, the Progressive Writers Association was primarily concerned with the use of vernacular languages for domestic ends.<sup>3</sup> Even as Anand continued to write in English and for an international audience, particularly as his early books were immediately banned in British India, he participated in a form of literary politics that took the national as its first area of concern towards a larger international end. In this sense, the disjuncture between Anand's literary practice and his politics is far greater than that of writers in so-called vernacular languages, and even from his vernacular contemporaries in the PWA such as Saadat Hasan Manto.

By the 1930s, it seems, the romance of internationalism is over, and with it, the transfigurative strategies detailed in my dissertation. Internationalism becomes a matter of national federalism, and language barriers are transcended only through constant translation, not through new idioms. The romance cedes its claim to the more commonly accepted politics of realism, retreating to the degraded popular category of genre fiction and its marginalization as pure fantasy. Yet even as translation becomes the accepted modality of intercultural contact, the fantasy of the obsolescence of translation — of a

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<sup>3</sup> See Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India : Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005).



universal idiom, or a common cultural frame — continues well into the twentieth century and beyond. Within the transnationalism associated with postmodernity and late capitalism, the politics of translation take a very different face.

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the *New York Times* admirably reported upon the newest possibility for universal communication: Google Translate. By feeding millions of human made translations into its enormous computing networks, Google had been able to highly refine the possibilities for machine-based translation. As the principal scientist, Franz Och, on the project explained: “This technology can make the language barrier go away. ... It would allow anyone to communicate with anyone else.” (quoted in Helft)

Even though the primary materials for the Google Translate tool (as for those of its major competitors, Microsoft and I.B.M.) are the transcripts of the proceedings of the United Nations and the European Union, there is no political vision in this project for universal communication. Far from the “Espero” of L. L. Zamenof and his green-starred followers, Google’s aspirations are for technology that would enable you to translate your German restaurant menu into English. Translation may still be a political discussion in the humanities, but in other spheres and other realms, universal comprehensibility has become the most banal of consumerist dreams. Translation without internationalism, it seems, is a form without a meaning.

## Appendix A: Manuscript Sources

I have included as much publication information as was available in the archival holdings. IOR refers to the India Office Records collection at the British Library in London.

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### **Reviews of Love and Life Behind the Purdah (MSS Eur f165/197)**

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"Women in India." No other information.

*Manchester Guardian*, 8 Jan 1902.

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"Love and Life Behind the Purdah." 2 Jan 1902.

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*Birmingham Post*, 3 Jan 1902.

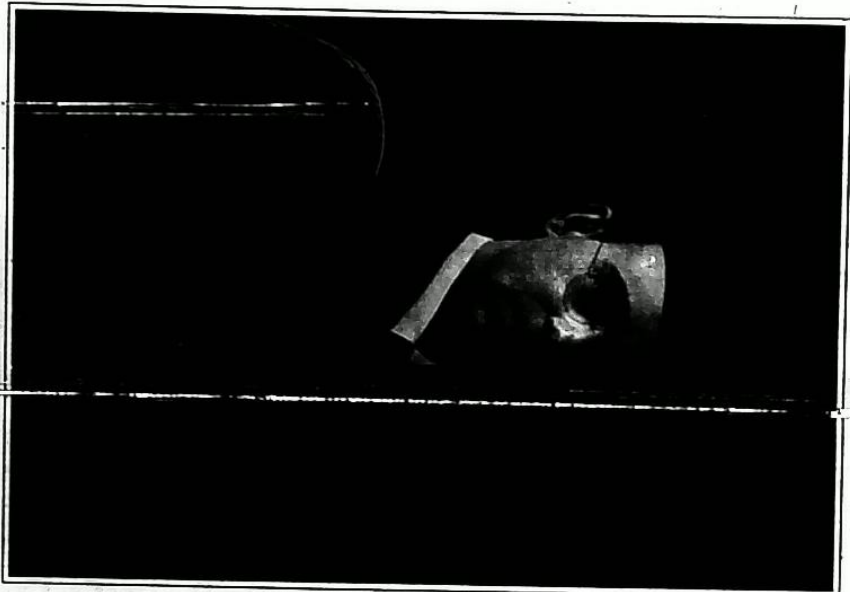
*Yorkshire Post*, 5 Feb 1902.

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1902.

# Appendix B: The Crisis



The 11th Spence Medal is awarded to Mahatma Gandhi for his peaceful leadership as first Vice President of the League of Nations, and especially for his leadership in securing the first non-violent award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930.

The Crisis

## To the American Negro A Message from Mahatma Gandhi

Let not the 12 million Negroes be ashamed of the fact that they are the grand children of ~~the~~ slaves. There is no dishonour in being slaves. There is dishonour in being slave-owners. But let us not think of honour or dishonour in connection with the past. Let us realize that the future is with those who would be truthful, pure and loving. For, as the old wise man have said, truth ever is, untruth never was. Love alone binds and truth and love accrue only to the truly humble.

Sabarmati, 1st May, 1930.

*M. Gandhi*



Small African Negro Conference for the United Provinces (New York), July, 1930

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