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Echoes and Exuberances: Baidar Bakht's Recent Translations of Urdu Poetry

THE MOST PROLIFIC, and possibly the most gifted, translator of Urdu poetry into English these days is, no doubt, Baidar Bakht of Toronto, a specialist not in Urdu literature as one might expect, but rather in bridge engineering, a subject in which he holds a University of London D.Sc. One first noted his considerable talents as a translator in *An Anthology of Modern Urdu Poetry* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1984) which he edited in collaboration with the Canadian poet Kathleen Grant Jaeger. Here, all renderings show Bakht and Jaeger to be deft and sensitive translators of the many “exuberances” of Urdu poetry into English.¹

One cannot help but compare this anthology to Mahmood Jamal's *The Penguin Book of Modern Urdu Poetry* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1986) which features one hundred poems by seventeen poets. As would be expected, there is some overlap of poets and poems in each volume. Both anthologies have individual merits and defects: (1) Jamal's volume presents breadth, Bakht's depth; (2) Jamal, an English-language poet working alone, has produced translations whose surface textures

¹The term “exuberance” (an artistic feature found in the original text and/or maintained in the translation) and its opposite, “deficiency” (the lack of a given artistic feature in the original and/or in the translation), are based on notions of José Ortega y Gasset developed in his 1934 essay “The Misery and Splendor of Translation,” for which see, *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. Reiner Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 93–112. Professor A.L. Becker's lucid discussions of these concepts during the NEH institute, “Modern Southeast Asian Literature in Translation,” which took place at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in the summer of 1992, were extremely helpful in understanding these ideas.

strike one as being less varied than those found in the collaborative effort of Bakht and Jaeger;² (3) the availability of the Urdu original opposite the translation allows for both playful and serious comparisons of the two, and is a highly desirable feature of the Bakht-Jaeger anthology; and (4) the extensive distribution and ready availability of Penguin books generally, and Jamal's anthology in particular, will bring tens of thousands of English-language readers to Urdu literature for the first time.

Baidar Bakht and his associates have since this anthology produced five volumes of translated poems by individual poets, and in what follows I shall review and discuss them individually, roughly according to their date of publication.³

1. Balraj Komal was born in 1928 in Sialkot, Punjab, and teaches English at Delhi University. The author of eight volumes of poetry in Urdu and Hindi, as well as a volume of Urdu short stories and a volume of criticism in Urdu, he has received numerous awards, including those given by the Uttar Pradesh Academy, the Mir Academy (Lucknow), the Ministry of Education (Government of India), and the Delhi Urdu

²I have suggested elsewhere that Jamal's renderings of Faiz bear an uncanny resemblance to those of Victor Kiernan in *Poems of Faiz* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971). See my "The Language of Faiz and His English Translators," *South Asia* (Australia), 14:2 (December 1992), which discusses five different translators' renderings of Faiz's poems.

³They are: (1) Balraj Komal, *Selected Poems of Balraj Komal*; edited by Baidar Bakht; introduction by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi; translated by Leslie Lavigne and Baidar Bakht (Delhi: Educational Publishing House; Toronto: Urdu Publications, 1989; 113 pp.; Rs. 40/-; us \$7.00; bilingual texts); (2) Shahryar, *The Gateway to Dreams is Closed*; translated by Baidar Bakht and Leslie Lavigne (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1990; 120 pp.; Rs. 25/-); (3) Akhtar-ul-Iman, *Taking Stock: Selected Poems of Akhtar-ul-Iman*; foreword by the poet; edited by Baidar Bakht; translated by Baidar Bakht, Leslie Lavigne, and Kathleen Grant Jaeger (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1991; 146 pp.; Rs. 90/-); (4) Amjad Islam Amjad, *In the Last Days of Autumn: Selection of Poems of Amjad Islam Amjad*; selected by Baidar Bakht; translated by Baidar Bakht and Leslie Lavigne (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1991; 66 pp.; Rs. 90/-); and (5) Kishwar Naheed, *The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice: Selection of Poems of Kishwar Naheed*; selected by Baidar Bakht; translated by Baidar Bakht, Leslie Lavigne, and Derek M. Cohen (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1991; 166 pp.; Rs. 90/-).

Academy. Komal also won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Urdu prize in 1985 for his collection *Parindōñ B̄harā Āsmān* (Sky Full of Birds).

In his introduction to *Selected Poems of Balraj Komal*, which contains thirty-three translations drawn from Komal's various collections, critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi notes that *Balraj* is the poet's single given name, and *Komal*, meaning "gentle" or "tender," his pen name. Komal's poetry, continues Faruqi, is "gentle, often understated, often complex and ambiguous. Sometimes puzzled and questioning, sometimes sad and lonely and occasionally rapturous, especially when he contemplates the antics of little children" (p. 1).

Many of Komal's poems feature children as personae, depict the "innocent" world of children, or use children's seemingly unaffected words as both perspicacious and perspicuous commentaries on the human condition. According to Faruqi, Komal has "an awareness of children and has a creative identification with them" (p. 2), much like Yeats.

In this context Komal's poem "The Paper Boat" (pp. 12–13) is notable. Here the small son of the speaker, also a poet, asks his father the same litany of answerless questions with which every parent is inflicted by a child wishing to avoid going to bed: "Why is the moon so far away?," etc. Finally, the child falls asleep and the speaker writes a poem. The next morning children are happily shouting, sailing "the fleet of tiny, wobbly ships" "in the lake of last night's rain." His son's boat is made of "The elusive form of the poem, / Familiar piece of paper, / Familiar words." If that isn't enough, the child calls out, perhaps to add insult to injury, perhaps to put everything, including the ruined poem, into proper perspective: "Anyone who doesn't clap his hands today / Is nothing but a fool."

Whereas most of Komal's poems about children are gentle and tender, several of them also contain images of extreme violence. One such poem entitled "A Girl Alone" (pp. 8–9), written in 1948, brought Komal immediate literary attention. Being the period of the post-Partition riots, it is not surprising that the poem deals with a young girl victimized by these events. She addresses a "stranger" and tells him that she has no one left in the world and

That small home under whose shade
I listened to the melody of lullabies,
Picked flowers,
Sang songs,
Smiled:

Today, it is not there.
 Today, it is not there.

She asks the stranger to “Stop for a moment” and to “Listen to this tear-soaked tale . . . ,” to “Take along this wailing made flesh.” In hopes of retrieving some tenuous connection with the world gone mad, she entreats him to be her mamma, papa, elder sister, tiny innocent brother, the proud rays of her chastity; and in a final, desperate *cri de cœur*, she begs: “Be anyone of mine, / Anyone.” The economy of the last two lines in English is simply stunning.

A poem which combines both a child’s profound comment and the theme of violence is “The Long Dark Lake” (pp. 40):

In that familiar town,
 Boys,
 Kids from school
 Were passing by noisily.
 A pious, innocent girl
 Was killed by her own hands
 In her own home.
 In the crowd of the streets,
 I was there too, with my mother
 And other home folks.
 The little one wanted me to repeat:
 A star shot from the sky
 Last night
 And went down
 Into the long dark lake.

The innocent child, “nann^{hā},” translated here as “The little one,” who wants the speaker to repeat lines from what seems to be a folk song, is the speaker’s little son or, possibly (but not probably), his daughter. The choice of the gender-ambiguous and sex-neutral “The little one” is one of the many exuberances of the poem and allows for several readings, one of which is that a little girl is commenting on the death of another girl. Such a reading, with its (intended or accidental) implications of sisterhood and solidarity, exhibits more irony than if the comment were made by a male child.

The violence in this poem is the suicide of a girl who, because of the references to her as “pious” and “innocent,” is perhaps a new bride. The

star, “broken” from the sky, is a kind of “postshadowing” or mirroring of the suicide found earlier in the verse. More important, however, is the “long dark lake” where the star lands, from which the poem takes its title. Is it the oblivion of death? Is it a kind of hell for suicides? Or is it simply an illusion of a star observed by a child seeming to fall into a spooky, black lake? Or something else entirely? Clearly, the ambiguity of the questions and their interpretations contribute to the complexity and quality of this poem.

A distinctive feature of Komal’s poetry is his use of colors, for example, the “yellow haze” in the poem “Your Stranger” (pp. 30–31). Yellow, and its variants in the forms of golds and reds, seem to be a favorite: not always associated with good things, and often with the disappointment that comes from overreaching, achieving, and in the process losing something else more precious. “Saba’s Hands Are Now Yellow” (pp. 35–36) is noteworthy in this context. In this poignant, wistful poem a young girl, Saba, paints her hands as part of her wedding ceremony; after a time, when the bride’s yellow wears off, she lives as a wife, possibly in seclusion, having given up much that had sustained her as a young girl. She has gone from youth to adulthood; she’s grown up and married, and has paid a price: “Saba does open her mouth and smile / But Saba no longer speaks to anyone / In whispers.” Wisely, the translators have given two footnotes to this poem, pointing out the pun on the word *Saba* as both a proper Muslim female name and its meaning as “wind,” thereby allowing variant readings of the text. They also explain the Indian custom of women painting their hands yellow prior to their wedding.

2. Shahryar, pen name of Akhlaq Mohammed Khan, was born in Aanolla, U.P. in 1936. Holding an M.A. and Ph.D. in Urdu from Aligarh Muslim University, he is currently affiliated with the G.N. Dev University Library, Amritsar. His collection *Xvāb kā Dar Band Hai*, originally published in 1985, received the 1987 Sahitya Akademi Prize for Urdu. Here translated for the Sahitya Akademi as *The Gateway to Dreams Is Closed*, this volume contains seventy *ġazals*, a genre in which the poet particularly excels, and fifty-one *nazms*. Many of the shorter *nazms*, such as “In Favour of Staying Awake at Night” (p. 86), “Night, O Night” (p. 88), and “Enemy World” (p. 89) have a *ġazal*-like quality to them, not only in terms of their theme but also of their length.

In the *ġazals*, Shahryar sets up a dichotomy between the world of his dreams and the reality in which he lives. This juxtaposition, in which the

reader is asked to compare the world of dreams to that of reality, forms a major element of the poetry, where images of the dream, dreaming, and a dream-like world abound. Shahryar is among the best living writers of *ġazals* in Urdu. Like all good *ġazals*, his have an ethereal quality, elusive and ambiguous, yet replete with rich associations and overtones, especially with imagery or phraseology drawn from earlier *ġazal* poets which are reworked in startling new ways to make a thoroughly “modern” poem.

A number of his *nazms* are poems of premonition and warning, especially if read in light of contemporary political, social, and economic conditions in India. Foremost among these is “Poking Fun at Sadness” (p. 114), which is suffused with a crushing sense of irony as it seems to prophesy the fate of Islam and its traditions, or Muslims and their culture, or perhaps even the Urdu language itself, in India:

After receiving toll from the seas
And crossing dreadful deserts,
The army of Husain, son of Ali,
Is coming;
In fact, it’s already here.
All the trees sway in ecstasy;
Angels are busy offering their respects;
Lamps are lit everywhere.
Tell us, why are you sad now?
What tragedy has befallen you?
Why do you still wear
A black band on your arm?

Two poems are dedicated to fellow Urdu writers: a touching lament consisting of four short poems entitled “In Memory of Khalilur Rahman Azmi” (pp. 76–77), in which the poet pays his respects to and shows deep appreciation for his mentor and colleague. The poem “Saughandi” (p. 115), dedicated to Sa’adat Hasan Manto (1913–1955), takes its title from the name of the prostitute heroine of Manto’s famous story “Hatak” (The Insult). Rejected by a would-be client who insults her, Saughandi, in a proto-women’s lib epiphany which even the staunchest contemporary feminist would praise, turns on her pimp, throws him out of her room, and falls asleep curled up with her mangy dog. Shahryar’s poem suggests that the exploitation and injustice toward the world’s downtrodden depicted in the story continue unabated.

The next three volumes of poems seem to make up a series; their basic layout and design are uniform, as is the color of their dust jackets: a deep, vibrant green. And it is notable too that, finally, the translators have added a few notes to help elucidate refined and important features of several of the poems.

3. Akhtar-ul-Iman was born in the village of Qila, Najibabad, U.P. in 1915. One of the major living poets of Urdu, he has written eight collections of poetry, of which *Yādēn* (Memories; 1961) received the Sahitya Akademi prize in 1962. The phrase “taking stock” in the title *Taking Stock: Selected Poems of Akhtar-ul-Iman* is drawn from the opening sentence of the foreword to the author’s collected works published in India in 1983. He states, “Recently [at about age 67], I took stock of my effects and all I could find is what you now hold in your hands” (p. 3): his collected works. In this essay the poet offers his opinions on the nature and function of poetry, his view of the role of the poet in society, and, perhaps most interesting of all, recollections of his youth—living with his parents in an orphanage, for which his father, an *‘ālim*, was the chief peripatetic fund-raiser.

The ninety-four poems in this volume are drawn from his eight collections, which span over forty years of poetic creativity. These poems demonstrate what the poet calls his idea of life: “passing the days”—something which “is not a conscious effort but is rather the lot that man has to cope with somehow.” The act of giving “some meaning to this passing of the days is, in reality, literature and poetry.”

One of the pleasures of having available so many works written over a long period of time is to analyze and compare earlier poems with later ones in order to look for changes which might have occurred. Thus in “Deprivation” (p. 17)—an early poem written between 1936 and 1939—the lover addresses the beloved: “You are not fate, nor the pain forever.” What they have shared in the past has “vanished like the night’s last tear.” The hope for reconciliation “too has faded.” He is torn between a desire to reconcile with her and his felt need to assert his autonomy, which is manifested through the denial that she, too, is suffering.

In terms of its imagery, theme, and rhetoric, this poem is rather traditional. The lover’s understated cockiness and belligerence toward the beloved taints the piece with a certain “modernity.” Feeling himself a wronged lover, he wants to try to get over his beloved, to attempt to live without her, to adjust to this “deprivation” in his life. The poem is a portrait of a young man; the poem, too, is the work of a young man.

By contrast, the opening of “Compromise” (pp. 102–103)—written between 1961 and 1969—is startling, and decidedly unromantic: “When I kissed her, the cigarette reek invaded my nostrils.” Though he considers smoking “a vice,” he has become used to this imperfection of hers. Similarly, “She, too, has become reconciled to my discoloured teeth.” And though their souls may be “dead,” when they meet

[...] in loneliness, in darkness,
 We become like wet clay.
 Hate is absorbed, only silence remains:
 Silence, which engulfed the earth after
 creation.
 We keep breaking like young branches.
 We do not discuss dreams that we once
 had.
 We do not discuss long buried joys.
 We just keep breaking.
 I am inclined to drinking, she smokes.
 We keep getting wrapped in the sheet
 of silence.
 We keep breaking like young branches.

“The Boy” (pp. 60–61), one of Akhtar-ul-Iman’s most famous poems, presents a highly evocative, lyrical moment in which the speaker sees himself as a small boy, a kind of *Doppelgänger*, who keeps questioning the speaker about aspects of his life and hauntingly asks three times in the poem: “Are you really Akhtar-ul-Iman?” Furious with the boy’s tenacity, the speaker replies:

That depressed, neurotic soul
 You keep enquiring for is long dead.
 I have wrapped him in the shroud of
 self deception,
 And thrown him in the grave of his
 hopes.
 I tell that boy the flame is quenched
 That was bent on burning all the trash
 of the world.

However, as if to reject this deception, and with it, all the speaker’s well-

defended resistances to self-awareness, the boy merely smiles and replies: “That’s a lie, a fib, a cheat. / Look! I’m alive.”

In “To the Elusive Life” (pp. 76–77), life is depicted as an elusive woman whom the poet has pursued with little success. Always looking toward “tomorrow” and “Forever getting ready for the big day,” he has failed to live in the present. “Heedless, improvident, all I’ve piled over the years / Is one fat deficit.”

A well constructed poem with a dominant central image, its English translation suffers from a jarring, decidedly unpoetic, and unfortunate rendering of *jam‘a-e xasāra* (literally “collection of loss”) as “one fat deficit.” Someone should have told Bakht and Jaeger of this “deficiency” before it appeared in print twice. A similar jolting deficiency is also found in “Hovels” (p. 13), where the translators use “this whole shebang,” which is too frivolous and colloquial for serious poetry like Akhtar-ul-Iman’s.

Altogether then, the poet who emerges from these translations is one possessed of singular, lyric gifts, a master of setting up dilemmas, contrasts, and oppositions. He writes forceful poems with children’s voices in them and love poems with great passion. As with every great poet, we are privileged to witness his “taking stock”; indeed, his “passing the days” as transformed into these poems has been an illustrious journey. One can also discern his subtle influence on the following generation of modernist Urdu poets, which includes Amjad Islam Amjad and Kishwar Naheed.

4. Born in Lahore in 1944, Amjad Islam Amjad writes with distinction both poetry and television plays. However, in spite of his success in this latter arena, he prefers to be known as a poet. He has published five collections of original poems as well as two volumes of Urdu translations of poetry from other countries, including *Aks* (Reflection; 1976), a volume of translations of Palestinian poetry. His other published works are a travelogue, a volume of critical essays, and seven volumes of television plays.

In the Last Days of Autumn: Selection of Poems of Amjad Islam Amjad contains forty-six poems from the author’s first four volumes of verse published between 1974 and 1989.

The poem “In the Last Day of Autumn” (pp. 48–49) reflects the tenor and voice of most of the poems presented in this volume: highly romantic, replete with traditional imagery which recalls Urdu poetry at its most amorous and melancholic, a poetry of silences, the unspoken, and might-have-beens. On the lushly described last day of autumn, “She came

into the desert of my life / Like a rain-filled cloud; / She perfumed my air. / The stars in her eyes, were metaphors of desire.” Placing her head on his chest, “She smiled suddenly / And was going to say something,” but hearing a nightingale cry out “in agony” (due, no doubt, to separation from its beloved, the rose), she departs. He is left to wonder what her “unfinished sentence” and, by implication, any potential relationship between them, might have been.

Another poem about leave-taking and silences is “How Cruel Is Time!” (p. 59), where the speaker and a woman, probably lovers once, run into one another by chance after a long time. They are surprised. They remain silent. Finally, she manages to ask perfunctorily: “How are you? Not bad, I replied.” She: “It’s strange to run into you after so long / Meeting an old friend makes one feel good.” The objectification and distancing through the use of “one” rather than the more specific “me” is notable. “The city has changed so much . . . / I must run now.” He: “I come here every evening / Do come, if you have time / I’m in a rush, too. / Must take your leave!” In this poem as well as “In the Last Day of Autumn,” the woman leaves, in the first case, to avoid a possible entanglement, in the second, to avoid another entanglement. The speaker’s leave-taking in the latter poem seems ambivalent: he has let her know he comes to that place every evening, yet he leaves, either to be a gentleman and let her leave gracefully, or to save face for himself.

It would be wrong to imply or suggest that Amjad writes only romantic verse. He also has another voice: that of a socially engaged poet whose purview also includes political poems, among them: “A Question” (p. 22), “Dreams for Sale” (p. 21), “A Suggestion” (p. 30), and “Gladiators” (p. 31). “Gladiators” especially, with its powerful imagery, is a damning indictment of, first, the Islamization process during the Bhutto and Zia regimes, which is cast in the same mold as the barbaric gladiatorial combats of decadent Rome, but also the complicity of silence of millions in Pakistan who viewed the imposition of so-called Quranic justice upon some guilty “other”:

(1)

When we watch the spectacle of our
 own murder,
 We whisper into the ears
 Of our quick breaths:
 The corpse that just fell on the sand,

Was not me;
 I am alive.
 Here, look at me!
 My eyes, face, arms,
 Are all in one piece.

(2)

It was only yesterday
 That our hands were being chopped
 off,
 But, snug in our homes,
 We watched the spectacle
 On national T.V.
 We insisted it wasn't us.
 Blood stains are still fresh on our shirts.

A brave poem written in troubled times. Braver still, however, is the poetry of Kishwar Naheed.

5. Kishwar Naheed was born in 1940 in Bulandshahr, U.P. She has a Master's in economics from Punjab University and she is director of the Urdu Science Board of Pakistan. In addition to publishing five collections of Urdu poems, she has translated into Urdu a collection of poems by world poets, a book of biographies and personal impressions of world writers, and the autobiography of Palestinian revolutionary Leila Khalid (b. 1944), *My People Shall Live* (1973). She has written extensively and in depth on a variety of women-related issues, has published a travelogue, textbooks for children, and a number of anthologies.

Naheed's earliest poems, represented in *The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice: Selection of Poems of Kishwar Naheed* by eight *ġazals* written between 1958 and 1969, show her as a poet capable of subdued understatement, a requisite of this genre, as well as powerful, direct statement, a requisite for being a feminist living in Pakistan. In one couplet, in what seems to be a complete mastery of the *ġazal* tradition, she turns the tables, as it were, on the traditional lover and shows him in some poems to be as cruel, deceptive, indifferent, etc. as male poets have claimed the female beloved has been. Other couplets have strong political overtones and an oracular sense of warning, which, in light of Pakistan's later political, social, and religious history, have proven bitterly true. For example:

“*Naheed*, let my belief suffocate a little bit more. / A storm usually emerges from calm winds” (p. 5).

A significant image in these early poems, and even some of the later ones such as “Recompense” (p. 32), is laughter, which is presented almost as defiance to the tears that are stereotypically expected of women; this is a laughter not born out of humor, but seems rather to be the only alternative to the anguish inherent in the human condition.

In subsequent volumes of poetry, Naheed turns her focus away from the human condition as a whole and concentrates a good deal of her attention on the condition of women. In the poems of *Bēnām Musāfat* (Nameless Distance; 1971) and *Galyān, Dhūp, Darvāzē* (Lanes, Sunshine, Doors; 1978) the poet seems to have found her distinctive voice, one which becomes trenchant, impatient, admonishing (to both men and women), and, to the thinking of some men (including some male members of the literary establishment) and some women, shrill and unladylike.

Several major themes occur in these works. First, a demand for true equality for women, especially in the form of choices; that is, women should have choices in their lives, many more than they now have. This is basically a call for change in the power structure of male-female relationships, which, in turn, will effect profound change at all levels of society.

Second, all people, but especially men, should recognize the achievements of women, whether that achievement is a poem, an office job, a comfortable middle-class home, or giving birth to a child; a corollary to this is that women celebrate and acknowledge as martyrs earlier women persecuted by men: Anarkali, the dancing girl who was walled-in alive for her relationship with the prince who would eventually become the Mughal emperor Jahangir; Qurratulain Tahira, the Iranian poet who was strangled for her unorthodox (read: feminist) views on religion; and the various tragic heroines of Indian literature: Noori, Sassi, Sohni, and Heer.

Third, and very centrally, men ought to grow up emotionally and assume their share of the burden of relationships, whether marriage or even love affairs; a corollary here is that relationships require attention and work, that they don't just happen, and merely because women seem better equipped emotionally to handle them than men, women are not to be the sole caretakers of such relationships. Merely to acknowledge women's superiority here does not get men off the hook.

And fourth, change is a frightening thing, not only in terms of

society, mores, religio-political climates, and relationships, especially with one's children, but even more intimately, one's relationship with one's body. Aging, an inevitable change, is for a woman particularly problematic in a society which allows men to take multiple wives, and accords older women power only in proportion to the number of sons she has produced.

The poem "The Maid" (pp. 36–37) threads together a number of these themes. Here a servant is addressed by another woman (her female employer? another maid? an elder of some kind?) who says that "Serving others / Is serving stones. / You live to be a sister, wife and mother. / Live for yourself too." Seeming to know about such things as "ego" and "existence," she continues with a traditional metaphor drawn from nature: "Look at the lotus flower! / How well it asserts its ego and existence / In surroundings so hostile." Breaking with tradition, the speaker questions the authority of a man—even that of a younger brother over a grown woman's—and audaciously suggests that flirting with other men is a woman's right.

Divorce, or the threat of divorce, as much as the denial women must put themselves through in order to conform to societal norms, especially where children are concerned, are other sources of their continued affliction.

Addressing the maid, the speaker then turns to her own situation, offering yet another flower image: "My dear friend, / Like the sunflower / I turn my head at the command of the master.

The speaker seems to be a woman who, with some regret, has not heeded her own advice; she has not lived for herself either. A victim of tradition, she advocates modernity.

Modernity is also advocated in many other poems, notably expressed as women's sexual interest in men. In "Fear of Dream in a Dream" (p. 23), for example, the addressee seems to be a woman with an office job who is interested in a man, who could be a male fellow-worker or even a neighbor. The poem's title and the identification of the speaker are important. The addressee is distanced from her sexual interest in the man by having her thoughts about him occur not merely in a dream, but a *dream within a dream*. Dreams with sexual content, Naheed indicates in several poems, notably "Hypocrisy" (p. 107), often terrify and confuse young girls and even grown married women. The speaker may well be the addressee herself, her conscience, maybe an elder (female? male?) of some kind. Whoever is speaking, s/he does so in admonishing tones, underscoring the forbidden nature of the thought.

This theme is similarly developed in “In a Split Second” (p. 47). A woman (the speaker) and a man meet in an elevator. She fails to avert her eyes, as a “proper” South Asian woman would, but makes eye contact: “We looked at each other,” she admits, then adds, “that’s all,” as if to deny the implied cultural sexual overtones in her action. He exits before she does, but she daydreams (the daylight counterpart to erotic nighttime dreams portrayed in “Fear of Dream in a Dream” above) on what might have happened if she had “followed him.” She states, “I’d be a corpse in his way.” As if she is reading *his* thoughts, distancing such thinking from her own psyche and projecting it onto his, she continues, using traditional poetry to describe the night of union of lovers:

I remember well his thoughts;
 They were feelings like wine.
 All night, that pleasure intoxicated me;
 But by the morning
 My body filled with room
 In the shape of empty bottles
 And ravaged cigarette butts.

The images in this poem, as can be readily seen, are not only traditional but also subtly sexual.

Autumn also seems to be a critical image in the poet’s middle poetry, but especially in the later volumes—*Malāmatōn kē Darmiyān* (Amidst Reproaches; 1981) and *Siyāh Hāšiyē mēn Gulābī Raṅg* (Pink Color in the Black Margin; 1986)—it becomes a basic, sustaining matrix of her verse. In the early poetry, spring and the color green, especially grass (most fully developed in the poem “The Grass Is Like Me,” p. 34), are images of renewal and hope, often equated with the power of women to regenerate, both physically and morally, the human race. In the later poetry green gives way to earthen tones, dust, and autumn with its seared leaves, all of which become a dominant cluster of images. Autumn, often in concert with the image of cobwebs, often depicts a sense of entrapment, not only in relationships, social mores, a country with a dubious political situation, but in one’s human body as well, especially as one ages. In “Autumn Song” the speaker describes her hands as “dust-ravaged like dry bread” (p. 13). “The Second Birth” (p. 88) is a compelling poem about wives who have “learnt to live / As the doorway dust” while their husbands are treated to the “second birth” of the title, i.e., visiting prostitutes. In “Save the Sun from the Rain” (pp. 136–137) “Dry leaves” are a reminder of

emptiness and unfulfillment; and in “A Picture” (p. 141) “autumn-smitten leaves” are a central image. In the final poem in the volume, “The Scream Peeping from Behind the Closed Door” (pp. 154–155), the speaker describes her fingers as being “like autumn-stricken branches,” dry and sere, a complement to the theme of the poem, which is a mature woman’s struggle to understand that her life *does* hold both significance and meaning.

A number of Naheed’s poems are also obliquely political, especially those written during the Bhutto and Zia regimes. “Constraint” (pp. 42–43) complains that people are choosing to ignore the political realities in which they live by seeking, effectively, the state of “blindness,” “deafness,” and “dumbness.” And in the potent “Speech No. 27” (pp. 44–45) the speaker, who describes her/himself as “not a Messenger” but someone who is “just looking carefully at today,” evokes a rhetorical style and revolutionary imagery reminiscent of the works of Josh Malihabadi (d. 1982) and later progressive poets. On the surface, the poem seems to be an attack on the growing acquisitiveness, described as an “animal-smell,” of Pakistan’s elites, with their “lust for money,” “limousines,” and “plastic face.” It can be read as well as an indictment of Pakistan’s political system, in which these same elites hold sway.

Finally, the poem which gives this collection its title, “The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice” (pp. 146–147), is a densely textured, syntactically convoluted poem which, through suggested reversals and oppositions, can be read as a caustic denunciation of those in power. Associations with the word *illegitimate* also include “illegal,” and even “subversive.” Indeed, *subversive* is a word which aptly describes much of this poetry.

Kishwar Naheed, a poet who is sometimes understated, often confrontational, and always provocative, is witnessing her society in an ambivalent, double-edged transition: not only towards and against westernization, but also against and towards Islamization. Attacking the extremes on either end as menacing and anti-human, she finds the middle position between them ambiguous and tentative, often testing the endurance of anyone’s capacity for change. Kishwar Naheed’s is a major, unique voice in contemporary Urdu literature not because she is a woman poet, but because she is a powerful, empowering poet whose poetic abilities and literary sensibilities match, and in some instances exceed, those of many of her male counterparts.

To conclude, let us consider a quotation from Walter Benjamin: “This task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*]

upon the language into which he [*sic*] is translating which produces in it the echo of the original.”⁴ Have Bakht and his associates produced translations which have “the echo of the original?” To this question we must answer yes. Therefore, they have succeeded very well.

In this context, it would also be good to remember many of the “basics” which writers on translation, such as Benedetto Croce, Walter Benjamin, George Steiner, Gregory Bateson, etc. have told us before (here presented randomly and without attribution): translation is an ongoing *process*, not an end, and is never fully achieved. A given translation is one of many possible ones contained within a work. All translations are successful, to a greater or lesser degree; all translations are failures to greater or lesser degree.

For Bakht’s translations, we might offer a suggestion here, a disagreement there. For example, introductory essays, such as Faruqi’s in the Balraj Komal volume and Akhtar-ul-Iman’s foreword to his own collection, were invaluable in giving context to the texts; similar essays would have been extremely helpful for the remaining volumes. Someone might want more notes (I do); someone else might not. There are also a couple of gaffes in English grammar. But, as the theoreticians of translation remind us, *all* translations and translators are vulnerable. Therefore, we must be careful when we criticize them. Those who have not translated will certainly want to remain silent, and appreciate. Those who have should remember how thankless and impossible a task it is, and appreciate.

⁴See his “The Task of the Translator,” trans. Harry Zohn, in ed. Reiner Schulte and John Biguenet, *op cit.*, p. 77.