

M. ASADUDDIN

Lost/Found in Translation: Qurratulain Hyder as Self-Translator

The Book of Laughter and Forgetting was written in Czech between 1976 and 1978. Between 1985 and 1987, I revised the French translations of all my novels (and stories) so deeply and completely that I was able to include, in the subsequent new editions, a note affirming that the French versions of these works “are equal in authenticity to the Czech texts.” My intervention in these French versions did not result in variants of my original texts. I was led to it only by a wish for accuracy. The French translations have become, so to speak, more faithful to the Czech originals than the originals themselves.

MILAN KUNDERA, “Author’s Note” (1996)

THE ABOVE DECLARATION in the “authorized” versions of Kundera’s books makes one realize the seriousness with which translations of his work are treated by one of the world’s major writers.¹ The note that he refers to, appended to all of his books published by Gallimard after 1987, runs in the original as follows: “entièrement revue par l’auteur, a la même valeur d’authenticité que le texte chèque” (entirely reviewed by the author, having the same value of authenticity as the Czech text). The revisions that he carried out in the French were so significant that the Czech original text could no longer be considered original. Instead, it was the French translation that became the authorized text approved by Kundera.

¹Kundera’s serious reflections on translation can also be seen in his incisive comments on the translation of Kafka’s works into English, where the translators, according to him, have falsified the original in their efforts to render his works in idiomatic English by eliminating repetition and the apparent roughness and sloppiness of style in the original. See his *Testaments Betrayed: An Essay in Nine Parts*. Translated from the French by Linda Asher. New York: HarperCollins, 1995. 100–115.

His assertions and his practice of reviewing and revising blur the distinction between the conventional notions of the original and the translation. In his author's note, he introduces two other terms, viz., "authenticity" and "accuracy," that fly in the face of his practice as a self-translator, even though he seems to swear by them. A certain kind of intentionality overrides the values of accuracy and authenticity that he endeavors to harness to his job in order to justify the alterations made in the French, and subsequently, in other versions.

Translation does constitute the "afterlife," as the familiar trope goes, of a text in more senses than Walter Benjamin would have us believe (1969, 73). It allows writers to cross boundaries of language and culture and enjoy readerships larger and vastly different than texts in the original would have assumed, and thus assures the survival and dissemination of the text across time and space. Indeed, the two tests of greatness for a writer and his works are timelessness and translation. This being so, it is natural that every writer would like to be represented in other languages through translation, but as they may not read the languages in which they are translated, they are not always in a position to judge the quality of the work and how well they have been represented. We often read translated literature in an unself-conscious way, assuming that the translated version is a true representation of the original, and often implicitly trusting in the authority of the translator. History is replete with examples of how a writer's reputation has been made or marred because of the quality of translation.

A writer like Kundera can inhabit two or three languages/cultures at the same time. But how about the many other languages and cultures into which his books are being translated? Can he possibly monitor how "accurate" and "authentic" these translations are? Certainly not. Under the circumstances, writers have to depend on translators for a wider dissemination of their works. And this relationship between writers and translators may not always be cordial. Indeed, it is often marked by tension and sometimes even hostility, unless the translator is of the status of say, Constance Garnett, who translated a massive volume of Russian literature into English in the first half of the twentieth century creating perhaps the first great wave of fiction rendition in the history of translation in world literature; or of Gregory Rabassa or Edith Grosson, who translated equally prolifically from Latin American languages into English in the second half of the twentieth century creating the second wave of fiction translation into English; or of William Weaver who contributed enormously to the body of Italian literature accessible to English reading audiences worldwide, earning the highest tribute from no less a writer

than Umberto Eco. However, if the translator is a lesser mortal, writers usually regard him or her as a useful but disposable appendage. If the work succeeds in translation, it is because of the inherent strength of the original, if it fails it fails because of bad translation. So, the poor translator has the worst of both worlds. Of course, the reverse can also be true. An incompetent translator can destroy the reputation of a writer beyond repair.

The fear of being misrepresented and the urge to reach a wider audience drive writers to translate their own works. They may also be driven by other motives, and these motives must be compelling enough to make them undertake the often painstaking exercise of rendering their own work into a language not their own. However, a self-translator's success or failure will depend upon bilingual fluency—not mere competence—and the ability to inhabit two cultural worlds simultaneously. Writers often assume that they are the best translators of their work, but this assumption may not always be correct. We have examples of both successes and failures in this regard. The most pertinent and successful example, to my mind, is that of Samuel Beckett (Vladimir Nabokov would be a close second). Beckett translated most of his works between French and English. Sometimes he would begin to translate even before the original was completed. Readers are often struck by his ability to recreate the effect of the original in his translation, “reinventing puns and compensating with new materials for anything which resists translation” (Connor 2006, 99). The original and translation are seen as near-identical twins “organically continuous with one another,” existing in a relationship that characterizes the entire body of his self-translated works. On this same subject Tom Bishop remarked: “The act of self-translation has given us the full texture of Beckett's oeuvre; each translation is not a superfluous addition, but an expansion of the work itself” (qtd. in *ibid.*). Beckett's apprenticeship under Joyce had made him aware of the extraordinary power and possibilities of words. The verbal economy that characterizes his style makes him a challenging writer to translate. The multiple versions of his translations (for example, *Waiting for Godot* has two well-known published versions in English) are often seen by critics as expansions of the original. The strategies adopted by Beckett in his practice of self-translation become an important means for helping readers uncover the meaning of the text and the intentionality of the author.

If Beckett's is a success story in the history of translation, there are failures as well. One known example is that of Rabindranath Tagore, the first and only Indian Nobel Laureate in literature and a great literary icon. Tagore saw translation as an instrument for projecting a particular image

of himself in the West. The desire to fulfill the expectations of his Western readers and be understood in their own terms led him to mangle, mutilate and cannibalize his works in all sorts of ways while rendering them in English. Very few of his translations represent their Bengali original closely. More often than not, they are rearrangements, reworkings or rewritings. He was clear about the fact that a close translation of Bengali poetry into English would not work. "I intend to carry the essential substance of my poetry in the English translation, and this means a wide divergence from the original," wrote Tagore in a letter to Ajitkumar Chakravarty, the celebrated Bengali poet (qtd. in Mukherjee 2004, 119). The divergences often assumed such proportions that the poems became almost unrecognizable. They were neither Bengali poems rendered in English translation nor successful independent English poems. Furthermore, he selected only certain kinds of poems that would facilitate his image as an Eastern sage and seer in the West, an image that was seriously flawed as far as his total literary output was concerned. This image took a beating fairly quickly, resulting in a lack of interest in his work. He had realized his folly after the damage was done and his reputation suffered an eclipse in the West. In a letter to Edward Thompson written in 1935 Tagore wrote:

While going through them [translations] as appearing in different books, I was startled with the slipshod character of most of their number and strongly felt the desire for a ruthless excision. I have done gross injustice to my original productions partly owing to my incompetence, partly to carelessness.

(*ibid.*, 120)

The above remarks are intended as a framework in which I would like to place my observations on Qurratulain Hyder as a self-translator. Posterity will judge whether Qurratulain Hyder has done herself good or harm by undertaking English translations of her own work. For the limited purpose of this paper, I will examine the deviations from the original in two of her novels and discuss the possible causes for these deviations as well as their implications for our notions of originality, textuality, authorship, and so on.

Hyder has translated both from English to Urdu and Urdu to English. She has translated Henry James's novel *Portrait of a Lady* into Urdu as *Hamī Ćirāgh*, *Hamī Parvānē* and T. S. Eliot's poetic play *Murder in the Cathedral* as *Kallisā mēñ Qatl*. There are significant issues that need to be addressed regarding these translations of English classics into Urdu, but they do not fall within the purview of the current discussion. From Urdu,

in addition to her own work, she has translated Ḥasan Shāh's *Nashtar* into English claiming that it was the first Indian novel. Her claim, as well as her translation, created a considerable stir in Urdu literary circles at the time.² A look at her translation of *Nashtar* will give us some clue to her translation practice. She adds a foreword and an afterword, the common translatorial devices for creating a context for the translated work. In the foreword she writes:

Nashtar was translated by Sajjad Hussain Kasmandavi into Urdu and serialised in the famous journal *Oudh Punch*. In 1893, it was published from Lucknow as a slim volume of 155 pages. The Persian book is extinct. I have translated Kasmandavi's edition. It is obvious that he has remained extremely faithful to the original and retains many passages and all Persian ghazals in his text. From time to time he makes his humorous comments on the author's views and actions.

(1992, 5)³

It is not at all clear how it became obvious to Hyder that Kasmandavi had remained "extremely faithful" to the original, particularly when he felt it was legitimate to comment freely on the author's views and actions in the body of the text. About her own translation of the Urdu version into English, Hyder says, "I have been strictly faithful to the text and have not anywhere modernised either the narrative or the dialogue" (*ibid.*, 8). Then she adds in the next breath, "I have only cut down the ornate passages and have also omitted most of the ghazals of Hafiz quoted in the narrative..." (*ibid.*). It is evident that the definition of being "strictly faithful" must be stretched quite a bit to accommodate all the deviations that Hyder herself admits to in her foreword. It is only when the English version is read alongside the Urdu original that the extent of her deviation from the original becomes apparent.

As far as the English translation of her own works is concerned, the following volumes have appeared: *Patjhar kī Āvāz* (1965) as *The Sound of Falling Leaves* (1994), *Ākhir-e Shab kē Hamsafar* (1979) as *Fireflies in the Mist: A Novel* (1994), *Āg kā Daryā* (1959) as *River of Fire* (1998), and *Mērē bhī Ṣanamkānē* (1949) as *My Temples, too* (2004). She believed firmly that she was the ideal English translator for her own works because only she

²For a detailed account of this debate, see Hyder (1994), Ṣiddīqī (1995), and Sarmast (1993).

³The title of the American edition is *Dancing Girl*. The Persian original by Ḥasan Shāh is known as *Qiṣṣa-e Raṅgīn* or *Aṣāna-e Raṅgīn*. *Nashtar* is the title of its Urdu translation/adaptation by Kasmandavī (ca. 1894).

knew the meaning that she, as the author, intended.⁴ She understood that the job of a translator was difficult and demanding. In an interview with Taqi Ali Mirza, she says:

Translation requires both skill and creativity. The translator has a disciplined and responsible role. She has to be faithful to the text and at the same time interpret the original in a way to render the translation as readable as the original.

(1998, 217)

However, it seems from her practice that all these rules were for others to follow, or were for those who were “mere” translators. A creative writer makes her own rules. Her translations from Henry James and T. S. Eliot take considerable liberty with the original. However, when she translates her own work, it is not simply a question of taking liberty here and there. Rather, it involves entirely refashioning the work according to a new aesthetic. Here, she considers herself totally free. There is no obligation to remain “faithful to the text” because it is her own and not somebody else’s. In the same interview she asserts:

A translator has to be faithful to the text, and she doesn’t have the freedom to make changes as it is somebody else’s text. I being the writer, can do so. I do not merely translate, I don’t even say that I transcreate. *I rewrite, and I rewrite with the English-knowing public in mind.*

(*ibid.*, 216, emphasis added)

She rarely granted permission for anyone to translate her work into English.⁵ Perhaps the solitary example in this regard is C. M. Naim who translated her novella *Sitāharan* and one short story (see *Season of Betrayal*, 1999). And I have it from very reliable sources that even a scholar-translator of Naim’s stature had a tough time getting that approval.

Before discussing *Āg kā Daryā* (*River of Fire*) it would be instructive

⁴In my personal conversations with her, whenever the issue of translation came up she always asserted forcefully that no one else could translate her work as well as she herself could.

⁵When the Indian National Book Trust took up the project of translating *Āg kā Daryā* into fourteen Indian languages, she was apprehensive about the quality of the translations. She tells Taqi Ali Mirza: “You see I have suffered a great deal on this account. They sought my permission to get my so-called great novel, *Aag ka Darya*, translated into fourteen Indian languages and I was told by readers of those languages that all these translations were terrible. My language is not easy to render into Hindi, and one sentence, one word can make all the difference. The meaning is lost, the atmosphere is lost” (*ibid.*).

to take a look at *Ākbar-e Shab kē Hamsafar* and its English translation. Major structural and other changes are to be found in the English version. Hyder's creative impulse takes hold right from the beginning. Indeed, it would be far-fetched to attempt to establish any kind of correspondence even between the title of the original and the title of the English translation, *Fireflies in the Mist*. They evoke distinctly different images in the mind of the reader. All of the material has been organized anew in the English version, new chapters have been added, old chapters have been merged into one another, and new characters have even been introduced.

The first two chapters in the English version, "Caledonia" and "Golden Album," are additions. These two chapters cover the prehistory of Deepali Sircar, the protagonist, by introducing her grandfather Romesh Baboo. The Urdu version starts with a description of Chandrakunj, where the protagonist Deepali Sircar lives with her family, placing her in her locale in the first chapter. The English version starts with a description of the Ganges and a brief history of Caledonia, a planter's house that was built in Dhaka by a Scotsman called MacDonnel Saheb. Then the reader is introduced to Romesh Baboo, the new owner of Caledonia. Descriptions of Caledonia are given in glowing terms and in purple prose. Romesh Baboo is presented as a thoroughly anglicized gentleman who composes heroic couplets in English. He may have been conceived on the real character of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the flamboyant Bengali poet. The first two chapters also lay out in considerable detail the lives of Nawab Nurul Zaman and Nawab Fakhrul Zaman Choudhury, including the predominant passion of the latter's life—music and dance. The reader is also introduced to Nawab Syed Ahmad Ali's album which provides a vivid picture of the lives of the aristocrats of that time. All these details are completely absent in the Urdu novel.

Further into the novel there are several chapters that stand separately and independently in the Urdu version but have been merged into one in the English. For instance, the twelfth and fourteenth chapters of the original, "Shantiniketan" and "Aamar Praner Aaram Moner Ananda" respectively, are combined in English under the title "The Cloud Messenger." In a reverse case, Hyder has split the sixth chapter in the Urdu, "Reverend Paul Mathew Banerjee," into two chapters in English, "The Rev. Paul Mathew Banerjee" and "A Sari for Virgin Mary." Besides this, there is a blending of the contents of some chapters into one another. The author-translator sometimes also adds or inflates some episodes in the translated text and this results in a certain shift of emphasis. There are omissions of segments of the original text as well. For example, about two pages of the original Urdu text that deal with the activities of the famed Bengali terror-

ists during the freedom movement of India have been deleted from the English text. Finally, the English version has been divided into three parts, whereas the original does not have this division of the content.

Apart from these kinds of structural changes, Hyder's general practice of self-translation has two major components—rewriting and recontextualization. To some extent, one follows from the other. Rewriting involves both compression and amplification and the introduction of a certain terseness and concreteness in the English version. A close analysis of Chapter 23, “Ganga and Brahmaputra,” reading the translation alongside the original, demonstrates this.

Urdu original:

[...] “Aččhā, kabīn sē māčbis lē kar ā’ō.”

Kis mazē sē hukm čalātē haiñ, maiñ kanīz hūñ un kī, zarkharīd, čarnōñ kī dāsī. Kitnē hī kāmređ ban jā’ēñ ašlyat mēñ rahēñgē vohī nakhālīš Hindustānī lārđ aind māštar. Maiñ nabīñ lātī māčīs-vāčīs.

“Arē bhā’ī zarā bhāg kar ēk lē ā’ō na kabīñ sē—‘Abdu’l-Qādir miyāñ sē māñg lō. Vōh zarūr bī’ī pītē hōñgē.”

“Maiñ un sē jā kar kabūñ zarā diyāsalā’ī dēnā jō mērē ēk ‘azīz dōst kō čābīyē jō mujhē bhagā lē jānē kā prōgarām banā rahē haiñ.”

“Jab tum (‘anqarīb inshā’-allāh) bhagōgī tō Binay Bābū lā-muḥālā yehī shubah karēñgē ke un kē zarī’ē hī tum ēk miyāñ bhā’ī kē sāth uṛančhū hū’īñ.”

“Is khayāl mēñ bhī na rabīyēgā. ‘Abdu’l-Qādir miyāñ mēñ intihā’ī fiyūđal vafādārī hai. Vōh āp kē Maulavī Abu’l-Hāshim nabīñ haiñ.” Daf‘atan vōh čup hō ga’ī.

“Vōh—vōh ham nē ēk subānā—nā-qābilē yaqīn khvāb dēkhā thā nā ...”

“Hāñ ... ” laḥkī nē ābista sē kabā.

(1979, 183–84)

English version:

“Get me a box of matches from somewhere.”

“I am no longer your courier for the underground. Sorry, wrong number. Besides, an Indian male, even if he calls himself a comrade, would always consider himself a woman’s lord and master ...”

“So you have become a feminist and are upholding the middle-class norms at the same time!” He laughed.

(1994a, 169)

Urdu original:

Būrhē nākbudā nē kāñ khayē kiyē aur nazdīk hō kar dīlčaspi sē bāt sunnē lagā. Aur ēk dafa’ muḥ kar naujavān kō dēkhā. Naujavān nē

muskurā kar usē “As-salāmu‘alaikum” kabā aur bāt jāri rakhī. “Baṅgāl Muslim akṣarīyat kā ṣūba hai. Yabāñ kī Muslim janatā prōgrēsiv liḍarship kī muntazir hai.”

“Navāb lōg tō prōgrēsiv liḍarship nabīñ haiñ.”

“Prōgrēsiv liḍarship hamāri hōgī. Hamēñ liḡ kē qarīb ānā hōgā.” [...]

(1979, 184)

English version:

The bearded skipper pricked his ears and moved a bit closer to hear the conversation.

“Isn’t he the ancient spirit of the river?” she whispered.

“Don’t romanticise everything. He may be the Ancient Mariner and all that. What interests me right now is that he may be a staunch follower of the Muslim League, hoping that soon these Indian rivers would turn into Pakistani rivers. Geography is changed by human beings.”

The shipmaster turned round and was greeted by an enthusiastic *Assalam Aleikum* by the young man. He was now telling his companion, “Bengal is a Muslim majority province and the Muslim masses are waiting for progressive leadership.”

“The nawabs of Bengal are Muslim League leaders. And they are so reactionary,” she hotly replied. With his keen river-eye the captain noticed that the heathen woman was very much in love with this upright follower of the Lord Prophet. But it distressed the Ole Man of the River when the fellow declared, “We, the communists, shall have to come close to the Muslim League. We shall provide progressive leadership to our masses.” [...]

(1994a, 170)

The following are the additions in the English version:

Arjumand Manzil was no Gothic castle. It was quite a normal household. But why didn’t Jehan Ara ever mention him? Why didn’t he ever talk about her? This man is a double-crosser. A two-timing crook. Sudden tears filled her eyes. She bent over the railing and stared hard at the dark waves. She remembered the nightmare she had had in Santiniketan. On waking up she had decided never to meet him again. She had not answered his letters. Still, he had chased her down the Ganges and here he was, smiling away so cheekily.

(*ibid.*, 171)

A military flotilla passed by. She walked down along the first-class cabins and spotted a figure in white. Lone White girl in a flowing milky-white nightgown. Dejected and pensive. Flaxen hair streaming in the wind. Diana of the Uplands. Perhaps the daughter of a top executive of the Scottish steamship company. Perhaps boyfriend Duncan was also aboard

one of those troopships, and was worried about him.

(*ibid.*, 172)

The above excerpts present a fair sampling of what goes on in the process of Hyder's intertextual transfer. As she explains in her interview with Taqi Ali Mirza, the process is more in the nature of rewriting than simple translation as we conventionally understand it (1998, 216). The first pair of excerpts demonstrates how the English version attenuates the original Urdu by deleting a substantial part of the Urdu text containing details about local color, behavior patterns of the local people (i.e., asking for matches from strangers to light up cigarettes, which is quite common in this part of the world), etc. The English version also introduces a discourse on feminism which is absent in Urdu. The second pair of excerpts is indicative of the reverse process. Here the English version not only amplifies the original, by stating explicitly what was only implicit in the original, it also adds details not even suggested by the original. The indigent, nondescript boatman of the original Urdu is transformed into the "Ancient Mariner," "shipmaster," "captain," and "Ole Man of the River," creating new echoes and resonances. What is "not progressive" in the original becomes "reactionary" in English. The historical details are also fleshed out in the English version. The two excerpts which are new additions in the English—one characterizing Arjumand Manzil as a Gothic castle and introducing the concepts of "double-crossing" and "two-timing," and the other, introducing the irresistible figure of a "Lone White girl in a flowing milky-white nightgown" in arresting detail—are attempts at recontextualization so that the English version seems more "natural" to English readers. To a lesser extent, Kundera did the same in order to make the French versions of his Czech works more accessible to the French audience.

Hyder has tried to get rid of the nagging questions of authenticity and translatorial responsibility in a single stroke by calling *River of Fire* a "transcreation," not a translation. However, this should not deter us from examining closely the kind of changes the original text has undergone in this process of transcreation that separates the original Urdu from the English version. In her brilliant essay, "The Configural Mode: *Aag ka Darya*," Kumkum Sangari, examines the varieties of genres—such as the Buddhist Jataka tales, the tales of the *dāstān* tradition, Hindustani music, and so on, that, according to her, informed the composition of the novel.⁶

⁶Aijaz Ahmad holds a contrary view in that he regards *Āg kā Daryā* as displaying elements of pastiche from other works, "the borrowings from a number of Orientalist texts, such as Basham's *The Wonder that Was India* and Herman

She regards the English version as a “recomposition,” arguing that “the two novels [i.e., the Urdu and English versions] have now to be read against each other and grasped together as part of a single configuration, rather than in the banalities of mistranslation or of the authorial hubris of recreation” (2005, 22). I would agree with the view that the two versions (of course, there are other versions done in other languages, including the Hindi version which the author supervised) together encompass the textuality of the novel and a reading of the novel will be infinitely more nuanced if a person has access to all versions rather than a single version. Nevertheless, an analysis of the process of translation (or mistranslation) from one version to another does give important clues regarding the changed perception of the author about her text, and an examination of this process certainly cannot be termed banal. The ruthless excision the original text undergoes in its English avatar, and the process of editing and inserting new short as well as long passages may conceal the politics of the author, and, as Sangari herself avers, they may indicate that “some concerns had gradually receded or become less pressing” (*ibid.*). They may also shed light on the author’s personal history of migration to Pakistan, and reverse migration to India, and the implications of these migrations for her literary career. There is a great deal of sense in Michèle Barrett’s assertion that “the politics of translation takes on a massive life of its own if you see language as the process of meaning construction” (qtd. in Spivak 2004, 369).

Apart from the fact that the target audience for the two versions is entirely different, during the forty odd years that separate the original from its transcreation, the author must have evolved along with the literary fashions and sensibilities. The first casualty of these changed sensibilities seems to have been the epigraph of the original novel, which was taken, selectively, from T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*. This epigraph foregrounded the particular historical vision projected by the work. It survives in the translations into the different Indian languages that were brought out by the National Book Trust, but not in English. Sangari recounts how she asked the author why she had left out the epigraph in the English version and was told dismissively, “*chūt gayā hogā*” (it may have been left out inadvertently), and Hyder refused to discuss the issue. But it would be naïve on our part to simply take such responses at face value without considering such changes. A writer of Qurratulain Hyder’s caliber would

Hesse’s *Siddhartha* are much too obvious and undigested.” Nevertheless, he admits the novel is a central document in the larger ideological ensemble of Urdu literature as it existed between the Partition of 1947 and the Indo-Pak War of 1965. See, Ahmad (1993, 6).

not append a lengthy epigraph to her most important work without sufficient reflection, nor would she omit it without sufficient reason. It can be viewed as an inalienable part of the author's politics, an attempt to influence the reception of her novel in the English-speaking world. Was it because literary fashions had changed and newer modes of viewing history had come into being, or was it because Eliot was no longer the rage, or because what was good for an Urdu readership on the Indian subcontinent might not necessarily be good for a global readership in English? Had Hyder stopped believing in a circular notion of historical epochs? That cannot be since the novel in the English version still endorses and encourages such a notion.

As for structural changes, compression seems to be the guiding principle that determines the reorganization of the original material, though there are instances of elaboration and amplification as well. The Urdu novel contains 101 chapters while the English version has only seventy-three. If we divide the text into the four historical epochs the novel encompasses, we find that, while the author devotes the first sixteen chapters spanning nearly 116 pages of *Āg kā Daryā* to Shravasti, or the period of Buddha, in *River of Fire* the period has been wrapped up in the first nine chapters spanning barely fifty pages. The second historical epoch, the time of Kabir in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, has been covered in nine chapters in both versions (chapters seventeen to twenty-five in *Āg kā Daryā* and chapters nine to seventeen in *River of Fire*). The third epoch, the British colonial period, takes up nine chapters in *Āg kā Daryā* while *River of Fire* devotes as many as thirteen chapters to it. The fourth part, dealing with the freedom struggle and the agonies of partition and its aftermath, is the most substantial. In the Urdu original it is covered in fifty-seven chapters spanning nearly 400 pages, while in the English it has been dealt with in forty-three chapters spanning nearly 250 pages. Within this skeletal framework of the transmutation from Urdu to English, chapters have been reorganized, contents changed, blended and reorganized, characters have been changed and added, new attributes have been given to characters, and narrative devices have been tinkered with.⁷ Further, whereas in *Āg kā Daryā* the chapters are indicated simply by numerals, in *River of Fire* they have been given individual titles, and these titles have been chosen quite consciously in a manner that suggests

⁷As for the characters, Champa's maid in the Shravasti period has been changed from Sarojini to Jamuna, Shahzadi Banu Begam of Jaunpur has been changed to Ruqaiyya, Cyril's native wife Shunila Devi has become Sujata, Professor Sabzjeevan has become Professor Banerjee, and so on. As for narrative modes, there are several major shifts from the Urdu original to the English.

the author had a very different readership in mind. Titles such as “Birdman of the Crossways,” “A Farewell to Camelot,” “The Forest of Arden,” and “La Paloma” have echoes and associations that can be understood by someone steeped in Western tradition and culture. Hyder was a writer endowed with a dual vision and plural sensibilities. It might be reasonable to suggest that when she translates into English, it is her anglophone sensibility and her notion of the novelistic tradition as it developed in the West that appears to modulate her text. Thus, in the “transcreation” of *Āg kā Daryā* into *River of Fire* there is an overall change in tonality; the Urdu version sounds lyrical and philosophical, while the English version sounds more earthy and sinuous. A comparison of the opening paragraphs from the original Urdu and the English version would amply illustrate the different orientation the writer wanted to convey in the “transcreated” version.

It is quite natural for anyone interested in translation studies to speculate on the reasons for such changes. The most important factor seems to be the anticipated readership. Qurratulain Hyder had a different readership in mind for the English version and she appears to have made changes to satisfy the anticipated expectations of this new readership. A second reason may have been a desire to improve the original Urdu novel. Writers constantly evolve in their art. When going back to their work after a considerable gap of time, there is a natural desire to improve and refashion the work in line with the author’s latest thinking. A third reason could be an author’s creative impulse that just refuses to reproduce something in a derivative way, even if it is in a different language. It may be difficult for a creative writer such as Qurratulain Hyder to stop being creative and tinkering with incidents, characters, and turns of phrase.⁸ Finally, there is also a notion that some languages, particularly Eastern languages, can tolerate a little verbosity, prolixity, ornate writing, purple

⁸At an international seminar held at Jamia Millia Islamia (Delhi) on “Qurratulain Hyder and the *River of Fire*: The Meaning, Scope and Significance of Her Legacy” (Feb. 5–6, 2008), Ritu Menon, Hyder’s publisher from Kali for Women /Women Unlimited, narrated her experience working with Qurratulain Hyder to arrive at the final version of *River of Fire*. “Aini Aapa would have several versions in English for the same chapter in Urdu. She would pull them out of a big box and say tantalizingly, ‘Shall we take this one, this one, or this one!’” This is certainly an unusual practice in translation history. It also indicates that Hyder, unlike Beckett, who considered self-translation a dismal drudgery, really liked the job of translating her own work, perhaps as a way to test newer facets of her writing genius.

prose, etc. All of these just do not work in English. English has to be sparse and bare, unadorned, understated, sinewy and tactile, shorn of any kind of airy-fairy prose. If there is wit, it has to be subtle; if there is humor, it must be tongue-in-cheek and self-deprecating. Thus, the seemingly rotund and baroque narrative fictions in our languages should be suitably laundered and pressed, with all of the wrinkles evened out in English so that the folds fall neatly into place. One wonders if Qurratulain Hyder shared such a view. All the same, there is no neat pattern in her deletions and insertions. In *River of Fire* these have achieved a certain crispness and compression stylistically, but have also resulted in an attenuation of the local flavor and a loss of the cultural nuances.

The above discussion demonstrates that Hyder's practice of self-translation, or "transcreation," raises complex questions regarding originality, textuality and authorship. In the case of *Ākhir-e Shab kē Hamsafar* and *Fireflies in the Mist*, which one should be taken as original and which one as translation? The title page of the English version simply says *Fireflies in the Mist: A Novel*. In her author's note on the following page Hyder says, "This novel has already been published in a slightly abridged form in Urdu, Hindi and Russian" (1994a, vi). In literary convention, abridgements are generally produced from larger original versions, but here, the case is the exact opposite. Should the two works be taken separately and independently? This also cannot be reasonably done since the basic plot and core characters are the same, and both have the same manuscript material as their primary source. Which one, then, is the master text and which the secondary? We might try to wriggle out of the situation by asserting that the two versions constitute a composite text. But there are practical problems in that case too. It cannot be expected that every reader will be able or willing to read the texts in both versions. If that is so, the readers' impression of the writer remains skewed by reading only the English version, or only the Urdu version, or the Hindi. Furthermore, if someone wants to translate it into another language other than Urdu or English, which version should be taken as the original—Urdu or English? How should these versions be arranged in libraries, research bibliographies, and so on? Hyder herself seemed to have this uncertainty and confusion in her mind. In a paper presented at the Sahitya Akademi in 1990, she refers to *Ākhir-e Shab kē Hamsafar* in English as *Travelers at the End of Night*, not as *Fireflies in the Mist* (n.p.).

Āg kā Daryā is now being translated into several European languages. In every case, it is *River of Fire* that is being used as the origi-

nal or master text. Like the French translations of Kundera's works, the English translation of *Āg kā Daryā* has assumed the status of the original. In the not too distant future we may have an Urdu version of the novel produced from *River of Fire*. Then the wheel will have come full circle and we will be engaged in an eternal chase tracking down the "real original." Shall we then determine the original text according to anteriority and posteriority, or the larger or smaller version, or shall we take both of them together as a composite text? Or, having failed to resolve the issue conclusively either way, shall we pronounce, with a Derridean flourish, that it does not really matter because the original is always already fissured? Perhaps the way out is to consider a new genre consisting of self-translation. What Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour says about self-translation in general is valid for Qurratulain Hyder's texts as well: "Because self-translation makes a text retrospectively incomplete, both versions become avatars of a hypothetical total text in which the versions of both languages would rejoin each other and be reconciled" (qtd. in Anderson 2000, 1251). The two texts cannot be substituted for one another. They remain complimentary despite belonging to their own fictive universes.

It would be naïve to suggest that the issues raised by Hyder's practice of self-translation make her a lesser writer, or that the issues can be resolved easily, or that they are resolvable at all, but a keen reader of Hyder must be aware of all these nuances of her practice as an author and translator that challenge traditional notions of originality, the singularity of texts, and authorship. We are now at a stage in translation studies where the terms of debate should really shift from questions of linguistic equivalence, the loyalty-betrayal paradigm, etc., to these larger issues. □

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