ANNIE MONTAUT

Translating a Literary Text as Voicing Its Poetics Without Metalanguage: With Reference to Nirmal Verma and Krishna Baldev Vaid

It is often claimed that modern Indian literature, and more generally culture, itself represents a process of translation, in the loose meaning of the term: the traditional indigenous culture has first been read and interpreted ("translated") into the terms of British culture / values by the British colonizers, an interpretation coined into Western cognitive frames which still permeates contemporary literature, by opening a complex space of "negotiation" between self and other. How is this "negotiation" handled in modern Hindi writing? The paper inquires into this arena by deliberately choosing two writers who both have been criticized for epitomizing westernization either in their topics or formal framing of their topics, Nirmal Verma and Krishna Baldev Vaid. It appears that in both writers, although in different ways, the use of supposedly Western stylistic techniques or topics amounts to a subtle subversion of them in order to voice a distinctively original message (whether or not we call it Indian), and that translation, now in the restricted meaning of the term, has to grasp with this stylistic subversion if it wishes to voice (some of) the original in a different language.

The Hindi writer Krishna Baldev Vaid thirty years ago wondered why English failed to allow India its legitimate place within the literary dialogue between cultures in the world. Why (even today when English Indian literature seemingly achieved that goal) are the regional literatures still ignored by their legitimate partners in the West, as opposed to Chinese or Japanese literature, although English should have helped to transcend the de-colonization misunderstandings and bitterness? Why? Because, he says, English has created an "enchanted circle" and imposed among Indians themselves a mode of communication which bans the majority of Indians from its "enchanted circle," so that we have per-

verted the way we perceive each other and, similarly, the way we and Europe see each other.[1]

One of the side effects of this "enchanted circle" is that Indian literature abroad today means English literature, and Hindi literature (and other Indian languages) seems even more and more invisible in bookstores, literally drowned under flows of English Indian novels; another side effect of this "enchanted circle" is the degradation of cultural awareness and knowledge, as stated by Pollock, regarding the state of scholarly knowledge on literary culture:

> Over the past fifty years, however, the ranks of this category of scholar [well versed in their literary tradition] have gradually diminished – so much so that the study of South Asian literary archives in their historical depths has lost two generations of scholars. There is now good reason to wonder whether the next generation will even be able to read Pimgal texts in Old Gujarati or *riti kavya* in Brajbhasha or ghazals in Indo-Persian. *After a century and a half of Anglicization and a certain kind of modernization*, it is hardly surprising that the long histories of South Asia literatures no longer find a central place in contemporary knowledge in the subcontinent itself, however much a nostalgia for the old literary cultures and their traditions may continue to influence popular culture.[2]

Similarly, Agnihotri declares: "A new generation had grown up: unfamiliar not only with Ghalib and Faiz but also with Kabir and Premchand; nor could they understand Prasad or Nirala […]; the staple diet was Bombay film Hindi".[3]

Why is English so problematic, though it has now become an Indian language? Because it has conveyed its cognitive categories as prevailing in the 19th century and largely contributed to the alienation of Indians from their own traditional cognitive categories, and because even today, well "indianized," it cannot voice the whole of Indian culture if we agree with writers such as Ramanujan or Ananthamurthy. Ramanujan defines Indian civilization as eminently "context sensitive" and "reflexive," a space where each text reverberates previous traditions, enriching them or subverting them, in an interconnected pattern of dialogue between

1 VAID, 1988.
2 POLLOCK, 2003:3 (my italics).
3 AGNIHOTRI, 2002:45.

learned and folk culture;[4] similarly Ananthamurthy defines it as a continuous discussion between the "front yard" of high canonical culture (*mārg*) and the backyard of rural indigenous traditions (*deśī*): "The tradition of lively dialectical contention between the royal highway and the indigenous in India will be marginalized if globalization encroaches over everything".[5] Globalization: the utmost consequence of modernity, and, ultimately, of colonization, since modernity came to India with colonization.[6]

With the term "modernity," or further on, "Western," I am not alluding to a strictly historical or geographical entity but, to quote Ashis Nandy's "Intimate Enemy," to "a world view which believes in the absolute superiority of the human over the nonhuman and the subhuman, the masculine over the feminine, the adult over the child, the historical over the ahistorical, and the modern or progressive over the traditional or the savage,"[7] of scientific rationality over intuitive emotion, of objectivity over subjective empathy, and, above all, a system of clear-cut categories in binary opposition with a clear hierarchy.[8]

The prevalence of the modern European-based pattern is particularly clear in the novel, a genre born during colonization in India and the emergence of industrial capitalism in Europe.

However, the Hindi novel (as well as Ananthamurthy's Kannada novel or other regional ones) may also voice the subdued yet not extinct voice of the traditional indigenous culture. These subdued voices stand in contradiction, or beyond, or beneath, their apparent, structural or stylistic, modernity: in contention with it.

I will take two examples of such contention, both from writers supposedly "over-westernized," either in their themes and characters (Nirmal Verma), or in their experimental ways (Krishna Baldev Vaid's

4 RAMANUJAN, 1999.

5 ANANTHAMURTHY, 2007:298–99.

6 On the logic of viewing the global market at the end of the 20th century as the ultimate logic of the 18th century Enlightenment via the 19th century progressivism and modernity, see TOURAINE, 1993.

7 NANDY, 1998:vi.

8 For the emergence of clear-cut categories in the mapping of Indian languages and cultures, see MONTAUT, 2005.

so-called complacency to the "absurd"), and both criticized by Jaydev Singh as pastiche of the West.[9]

1. Nirmal Verma and the concept of time

1.1. The gaze on the world [10]

Nirmal Verma, my first example, grants a great deal of attention to the way his protagonists learn how to look at outer and inner reality, which determines or is determined by their (his?) worldview. The novel *Ek cithṛā sukh* ("A Ragged Happiness"), happens to include, through the formal device of "mise en abyme" (embedded story/discourse), such a lesson on the art of looking at things, epitomized as a possible metaphor of the whole writing. This episode of the lesson on "how to look at things" is introduced by the project, if not a full fledged program, of being a writer: "I will remember, I will write it in my diary". This sentence, in which the third person narrative shifts to the first person, is followed by the brief notation of a scene observed from the room on the *barsātī*: "Bitti was hanging the clothes […] and I …"[11] It is quite striking how the

9 The view that Nirmal Verma's novelistic art is an adaptation of European techniques and notions is indeed quite widespread in Indian literary critique, ranging from Indranath Madan (MADAN, 1966:136–38), Lakshmisagar Varshney (VARSHNEY, 1954:69 ff.), Chandrakanta Bandivadekar (BANDIVADEKAR, 1977:399) to, more recently, Jaydev Singh (SINGH, 1993:48–49). For a longer study on the style of K. B. Vaid and N. Verma, see MONTAUT, 2001/MONTAUT, 2004 and MONTAUT, 2000/MONTAUT, 2006 respectively.

10 The word "gaze" is not used here with its postcolonial overtones as it is in GUPTA, 2000, but in the traditional way the poet Wordsworth for instance used it in his famous poems on daffodils ("I gazed and gazed …"). It involves *vismay* as seen *infra*.

11 VERMA, 1980:19. All translations are mine; in order to keep a very literal and almost word-to-word equivalent, they include punctuation, which is generally never kept in the translations (an exception is the French *Le Toit de tôle rouge / Lāl ṭīn kī chat* at Actes Sud, 2004, but not *Un Bonheur en lambeaux / Ek cithṛā sukh*, Actes Sud, 2000, for which I could not convince the editor!). Kuldip Singh's translation

three dots (quite frequent in Nirmal Verma's fictional writing) link both first the observed scene to the "I," and then the "I" to his favorite game (*khel*) which triggers the memory of the drawing lesson. This punctuation also has another effect: it makes the suspended word stand in isolation, like an island suspended between two silences, cut off from what precedes and what follows, while at the same time connected to the neighboring sequences as an iconic announcement of what will follow. Knowing that the whole structure of the novel is made to disclose, within the main protagonist, the inner "I" (*maiṁ*) who observes the events in the third person ("he," *vah*) and is transformed into a writer by writing from memory and by reliving the events, having left the deserted scene at the end of the novel in a Proustian structure,[12] we cannot overestimate the impact of this short piece of poetics within the overall economy of the novel. Such a meta-narrative injunction to "see" describes the writer's stance in a novel aimed, among other things, at describing the genesis of the writer. Let us first re-read the passage, which carries on in the third person immediately after the quote mentioned above and immediately before taking us into the "lesson":

> वह अपने बिस्तर पर लेटा था। कितनी बार वह यह खेल अपने से खेलता था—जैसे वह दुनिया से कहीं बाहर से देख रहा है, शाम, छत, बिट्टी और डैरी—वह उन्हें नहीं जानता। वह उन्हें पहली बार देख रहा है। उसके ड्राइंग मास्टर क्लास में कहते थे—
>
> He was lying on his bed – how many times had he not played this game with himself, as if he was looking at the world from outside, evening, roof-top, Bitti and Dairy – he does not know them. He is looking at them for the first time. His drawing master used to say in the classroom –

Then comes the "lesson," after a simple dash instead of a strongly demarcative punctuation:

> देखो, यह सेब है, यह सेब टेबुल पर रहता है। इसे *ध्यान से* देखो। *सीधी* आँखों से—एक सुन्न निगाह *सूई की नोक-सी* सेब पर बिंध जाती। वह धीरे-धीरे हवा में घुलने लगता, गायब हो

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reads: "Bitty was hanging clothes out to dry […]," the "*aur maiṁ*' sequence is skipped.

12 See the analysis of the structure of the novel in MONTAUT, 2000. One of the threads linking memory, death, rebirth and vision with writing (and art in general) is the diary given by the young boy's mother, whose death he keeps seeing again and again.

जाता। फिर, फिर, अचानक पता चलता—सेब वहीं है, मेज़ पर, जैसे-का तैसा—सिर्फ़ वह अलग हो गया है, कमरे से, दूसरे लड़कों से, मेज़ और कुर्सियों से—और पहली बार सेब को *नई निगाहों से* देख रहा है। नंगा, *साबुत, संपूर्ण*… इतना संपूर्ण कि वह भयभीत-सा हो जाता, भयभीत भी नहीं—सिर्फ़ एक *अजीब-सा विस्मय* पकड़ लेता *जैसे* किसीने उसकी आँखों से पत्ती खोल दी है। (पृ. १९, I underline)

look, this is an apple, this apple is on the table. Look at it *with attention*. With *right* eyes – an empty look pierced the apple *like the head of a needle*. It/he began to slowly dissolve in the air, disappeared. Then, then, suddenly became aware – the apple is exactly there, such as itself – only he has got separated, from the room, from the other children, from the table and the chairs – and for the first time looks at the apple *with new eyes* (a new look). Naked, *entire*, *complete* … In such a wholeness that he became kind of frightened, not even frightened – only a *somewhat strange wonder* seized (him), *as if* someone had lifted a bandage from his eyes.

The object put before the pupils to observe, the apple, belongs to the well known tradition in the training of Western still-life painters, but this tradition receives a different inflection from the words used to describe it. The apple, while disclosing its pure object-ness after dissolving in a literally wonderful (*vismay*) way, becomes part of a process. This process, the perception that unites the perceived object and the perceiver through the act of perception itself, is a classic reference in the theory of meaning and grammar as well as in the theory of aesthetics in Sanskrit. In Nirmal Verma's novel, the still life, once perceived correctly (*dhyān se*, "with attention"), is perceived with both acuteness (*tezī*, "acute," *suī-sī nok*, "needle head," *bi̇̀dh*, "pierce") and emptiness (*sunn*, "empty," *ghul* "dissolve"); *dhyān* and *sīdhī* in Hindi also connect with the tradition of ascetic devotion and spiritual achievement. The acuteness, which allows the thing perceived to stand in absolute isolation (*naṅgā*), complete in itself (*saṃpūrṇ*), is dubbed by a blurring of the distinctive categories (approximative *-sā, jaisā*[13]) in a kind of sideration (*vismay* "wonder") which enables the object to dissolve within the ambient elements. It is at

13 Very recurrent in Nirmal Verma's writing, as well as the expressions *aisā lagā, jān paṛā, jaisā, māno, -sā*. The suffix *–sā*, originally from *jaisā* (< Skr. *sādṛśya*) "looking as, resembling," itself related to the root *dṛś / darś* "to see, to look". Although *darś* and *darśan* are not words used in the novel (as opposed to the essays), but the concept of this particular vision is very present.

the same time a part "apart from" and "part of" the whole, a double apprehension typical of Nirmal's view of the relation between subject and world. On one side there is *tadvivek* ("discrimination"), enabling for the chiseled representation of things, and on the other side *tanmaytā* ("empathy"), both allowing for non differentiation between perceiver and perceived, both allowing things to vibrate and connect together.

So that the still life perception is subtly distorted into a vibrating life, things becoming living entities and active participants, again a subdued reference to the classical vision of the cosmic world in Indian tradition.[14]

Further on in *Ek cithṛā sukh*, after the suicide of an important character in one of the last chapters, when the boy is already becoming an adult and a writer (one who remembers, since writing is remembering, and remembering is seeing things a-new, "as for the first time"), and when the fusion of his "I" and his "he,"[15] allows a "you" to appear in the shifting process of (de)identification, objects are also described as active entities endowed with a consciousness of their own, a crucial feature in a world of inter-relatedness connecting "I," "he," "it," the self, the other, the world, make the "he" alternately a "I" and a "you".

> वहाँ अब कोई नहीं था। कोई नहीं था। सिर्फ़ वह था, जो अब मैं हूँ …
> दुर्घटना की भी एक आत्मा होती है। यह मैंने उस रात देखा था। देखा था, मैं ठीक कहता हूँ, क्योंकि उसकी गन्ध आपस की चीज़ों को भी पता चल जाती है और वे अपनी-अपनी जगह से उठकर तुम्हें घेर लेती हैं … और तुम उन्हें हक्की-बक्की निगाहों से ऐसे देख रहे हो जैसे उन्हें पहले कभी नहीं देखा। (पृ. १४०)
>
> Now there was nobody there. Nobody was there. He only was there, who is now I …
> Catastrophes have their own soul. This I have seen that night. I have seen, I say right, because even the things around become aware of their smell and get up from

14 Fully explicit in Nirmal Verma's essays, but showing without meta-discourse in his fiction.

15 Nirmal's writing alternately focuses on the same character as a first person narrator or as a third person observer in the sequence. Elsewhere in the novel it is stated that through the process of writing/memorizing "his 'he' transforms into his 'I'" (*uskā vah uske maiṁ meṁ badaltā hai*).

> their place to circle around you … And you look at them with dumbfounded eyes as if you had never seen them before.

1.2. Relevant stylistic devices

In the sequence of the Allahabad fair, which occurs in the form of a reminiscence from childhood and accounts for the title,[16] the two children Bitti and the boy "he," alone, sitting in the sky, in the abandoned giant wheel at night, similarly step into a space where they can reach at this "true" vision of things. Here *tanmaytā* is obtained by the repetitive, almost mesmerizing, creation of an interspace (*bīc meṁ, na ūpar, na nīce*), again with a profuse use of the approximation suffix *–sā, jaisā*, which progressively results in a reversion of the "outside" darkness into a shared "inside" darkness in both children (*ek dūsre ke andhere meṁ jhakṛe hue* "frost in each other's darkness"). This is the precondition discretely stated for suddenly reaching at "truth," in counterpoint with the children's dialogue on happiness, rebirth, detachment, leaving one's ordinary self; and truth is presented as a travel from appearances toward the "impossible," which is the real.

> उसे कुछ समझ में नहीं आया, किंतु उस रात बीच हवा में बैठे हुए उसे सब कुछ सच लगा था, असंभव लेकिन सच, चंदनी रात में पेड़ों के नीचे एक खेल जैसा, जिसमें जो दिखाई देता है, वह नहीं है, जो सचमुच में है वह दिखाई नहीं देता। (पृ. ९९)

> He did not understand anything, but sitting in the air of that night he felt as if everything was true, impossible but true, like a play under the trees in the silvery (moonlighted) night, in which what is visible does not exist, what does exist is not visible.

Immediately after this piece of dialogue already set in such a specifically "evocating" frame, comes a short piece of poetic description:

> वह भयभीत-सा हँसने लगा […] [बिट्टी] का स्वर इतना हल्का था कि अँधेरे में जान पड़ा जैसे वह किसी स्वप्न का चिलका है, जो उसके हाथ रह गया है, तारों की पीली छाह में काँपता

16 "What is happiness?" a character asks the "oracle"-like witch, and the answer is "rags".

> हुआ—उसे नीचे की तरफ़ खींचता हुआ जहाँ इल्लाहाबाद के इतने वर्श बेकार तुकड़ों की तरह हवा में उड रहे थे … (पृ. १४०)
>
> rather frightened, he started laughing […]. Bitti's voice was so light that it seemed in the darkness as some peeling of a dream which had remained in his hand, shivering in the yellow/pale shadow of the stars – pulling him down, where all the many Allahabad years were flying in the air like useless bits and pieces …

How is the poetic dimension obtained here? No particularly poetic word except the vagueness of the "dream" in its Sanskrit equivalent (*svapn*), no great metaphor, no elaborate phraseology or image. But this single sentence, further de-articulated by the punctuation (three dots, dashes), is right from the beginning framed, or lit, on the background created by the boy's state of mind: *bhaybhīt-sā*, the very word associated with the feeling of wonder (*vismay*), which creates an expectation for what follows. What follows is a series of low-keyed metaphors. The voice, made into the outer shell of some dream, then made immaterial, further recovers materiality when described as shivering or trembling in the boy's hand, and this trembling is in a way borrowed from the twinkling light of stars. The whole scene becomes strange (suggestive of metaphysical / aesthetical wonder) because words are slightly displaced, either by a trope or by an apparent inadequacy (*chilkā, chāh*): the selection of the improper word, a well-known impressionist device, is handled by Nirmal Verma as a subtle "*anaucitya*" with great mastery. A dream has no *chilkā* (peel), but the *chilkā* makes it physically sensible that the boy is left with a *śeṣ*, a remnant, a left over in both analytical and physical meanings (the echo, *pratidhvani* of the voice). Similarly the prosaic "pieces" (*tukṛe*) renews the worn out metaphor of "gone with the wind" – distorts it too, since the memories are not exactly gone with the wind and forgotten; they are half forgotten, half part of the surrounding wind, as are the contingent pieces of the past for the detached "seer," apart from him yet a part of him.

Punctuation also, although a modern invention in writing, is made by Nirmal a device for sustaining the particular *lay* (rhythm) of the text: the flat pauses (–, …) prevent the reader from operating hierarchies in the syntactic levels and clauses. They oppose the logical demarcations between clauses and especially the lowering tone of end marks: hence the creation of both an anti-dramatic rhythm and a melodic line with almost no peaks and many silent pauses, a space for internal echoes to

reverberate. Assuming that standard punctuation in a written text is a marker of logical junctures and helps interpreting logical dependencies, we are dealing here with a process of de-intellectualization, allowing for a parallel reading with a non-logical interpretation, a relation of equivalence and not of dependence and hierarchy, which best suits the register of perception than that of rational interpretations.

Similarly, the "short imperfect," a specific Hindi tense without temporal marker (*jātā* for *jātā thā*, "used to go"), helps in Nirmal Verma's novels, particularly in *Lāl ṭīn kī chat*,[17] delocalizing the sequences in the short imperfect from the temporal frame; this is not a purely formal play used to subvert the classical orientation of the narrative time, from a "before" to a logically articulated "after" (as other disruptive devices in modernist Western novels used to contest the *imperium* of realist canonical narration). What is at stake here is defining a space beyond the rational and phenomenological points of reference which build the ordinary time-space frame, reaching at this literally extra-ordinary time-space which is outside time-space while proceeding from time-space, in a search for immanent transcendence. In that novel as in *Ek cithṛā sukh*, we also find almost philosophical passages which relate the "right" way of seeing to the trespassing of the clear-cut categories of time and space, for instance when describing the mesmerized state of the girl after the little dog's death: "a speedless speed, where there is no time, no death, neither night or day, only a life running along the rail, a woolen ball…" (*ek* gatihīn gati*, jahāṁ* na *samay hai,* na *mṛtyu,* na *rāt* na *din, sirf*

17 VERMA, 1974. Even within a series of apparently similar reminiscences, as in page 17 when the little boy remembers all the facts related to the automnal exodus from the hill station, all processes in the short form are in a way inter-changeable, (*utrāī śurū ho jātī*, *cīr kī sūiyāṁ dikhāī detīṁ*, *pīlī paṛ jātīṁ*, *śahar ko dekhtā*), but the one in the long form, closing a quite long enumeration, relates to a very salient fact (*pitā kā cehrā jhāṁktā thā*): father's face is such a saliency in Chote's imagination that it breaks the continuity and prevents the use of the short forms which blurs out differential features. Both sequences are well rendered in Kuldip Singh's translation (SINGH, 1997:10): "[Chote saw what looked like swarms of ants] marching downhill in single files among yellowing pines, away towards distant cities" and "behind which peered one face: his Babuji's".

patriyoṁ ke bīc bhāgtī huī ek jān, ūn kā golā …) (p. 50–51).[18] The location of truth derived from such settings is a special kind of memory, "which is not memory," which is equated in the text with "the memory before memory is born, a memory transformed [for the girl] into the dream of a very ancient night." (*jo smṛti nahīṁ hai, vah smṛti banne se pahle kī smṛti hai, jo mere lie ek bahut purānī rāt kā svapn ban gayā*)[19] What is this memory, which is beyond memory, and builds for the girl a primeval night beyond the very concept of beginning, before any process, before temporality itself? It transforms the things experienced into the memory of them, introduces a distinctly non narrative dimension in the text, but also points to an atemporal ongoing present which coincides with the "right" vision: time as an all embracing present rather than a succession of clearly oriented events, memory as a collective memory grounded on a diffuse feeling of belonging rather than on a clearly preserved collection of facts and things "of the past".

Nirmal Verma's essays largely deal with the concept of time as an eternally ongoing atemporal present (*nirantar vartamān*), which is the time of myth and not of history. They also deal extensively with the diffuse feeling of belonging, an all-inclusive empathy with one's culture in traditional societies, as opposed to the modern conception of culture; they deal with the interconnectedness (*antargumphit, saṃlagnatā*) of all living and even non animate beings in a non-centred, non-hierarchical universe where the sacred, the nature and the humankind share the same living space.[20] The essays are in this regard very similar to what Ashis Nandy defines as the traditional vision of time and relations in the indigenous Indian cultures opposed to the sequential, discrete, oriented time

18 I underline; "leaving behind nothing, a nothingness, time spinning to a standstill, a living creature running for its life between the rails, a little ball of wool" in Kuldip Singh's translation (SINGH, 1997:39).

19 Simply "all of which is a memory, a nightmare that keeps returning" in Kuldip Singh's translation.

20 VERMA, 1991 and VERMA, 1995. Whereas, according to him, the Western notion of culture relies more on an objective relationship with one's historical past and on clear-cut categories, the very one, for the matter, emphasized by the various nation building processes in Western Europe. More on these opposed views in MONTAUT 2005.

in the modernist and progressive view. Very similar to Gandhi's views also, and the condition for morality and real civilization according to Nandkishore Acharya.[21]

But I wished here to draw these claims of the "uncolonized mind" from Nirmal Verma's poetic prose rather than from his ideological contributions, since the very style of the novel achieves without metadiscourse what is elsewhere discursively explained. And this has been my "program" as a translator, in Berman's terms, or my "task" in Benjamin's terms, to honor such claims, even at the cost of fighting with the editor and publisher! (on punctuation, on saving the many – *sā/jaisā*, "seemed like," "felt as," etc.).

2. Krishna Baldev Vaid's "metaphysical" novels beyond distinctiveness

My program is of course different when translating Krishna Baldev Vaid's stories and novels, where the questioning, the inner criticism by means of reformulations, negations, constant alternatives and non assertive modalities, appear as one of the most significant stylistic devices converging to the expression of a generalized skepticism and ultimate indeterminacy of causes. But it is a skepticism (along with derision and comic) which also questions clear-cut identities and the very notion of category itself, perhaps no more clearly visible than in *Dūsrā na koī*

21 Nandkishore Acharya sees *naitiktā* as the basis of culture and civilization (*saṃskṛti*), since it derives from a consciousness of belonging to the whole universe (ACHARYA, 2007:12). He also relates it to non-violence, *ahiṃsā* (ACHARYA, 2007:19–23), whereas violence is equated to centring (*kendrīkaraṇ anivāryatah himsā kī manovṛtti ko baṛhā detā hai*, "centring [statewise, administrative, economic, psychological, whatever form it takes] necessarily increases the tendencies towards violence", ACHARYA, 2009:15).

(1978), a novella written in the first person in the late seventies, conveying the "I"'s anxiety and metaphysical quest through black humor.[22]

2.1. Away from binary structures

Apparently the novella deals only with the erratic moves of a dishevelled old man close to death in a tumbling house looking like a monster like him, in an alien country. The English translation, *Dying Alone*, emphasizes this aspect along with the Beckettian undertones, of the piece. And indeed the narrator keeps crawling from one room to another, scribbling down his notes in awkward positions, due to arthritic pain, rumbling in his confuse memories, contemplating for instance the garland he himself wants to make out his own excrements. But, contrary to the twin novella *Dard lādavā* ("Incurable pain," lit. "pain with no remedy"), there is still in *Dūsrā na koī* something like a narrative fabula, since an affair with an old lady in the neighbouring house occupies the first third of the text, in the form of immediate reminiscence (the failure of the affair, described in a sarcastic, hyperrealist and sometimes obscene way, is very recent), and, more important, a semi-fantasized "He," the Emperor of fundamental questions (*buniyādī savāl kā bādśāh*) both an opposite and an alter ego of the "I" ("my mentor," "my mortal enemy" – *janm duśman*), serves as the character of the opponent, their verbal struggle occupying a good deal of the text. Interestingly, even at this basic narrative level, these essential opposed categories of the hero and opponent, supposed to be the minimal condition for a narrative in the structuralist pattern, tend to lose their differential features (see *infra*) and finally get fused for their joined ultimate flight into emptiness. So that the dying is not exactly alone nor is it exactly dying, and, significantly, the whole process of the narration thus offers an alternative model to the structuralist pattern of narration. The real rhythm which provides for the narrative progression, in addition to the alternation between alacrity and lethargic stupor which gives the *lay*, is due to the recurring of a "mantra," which embodies the

22 VAID, 1978. On the relation between humor, paradox, skepticism and illumination, see Vaid's *Javāb nahīṁ* ("No answer") published in 2000, particularly the sections on Buddha (VAID, 2000).

narrator's quest for bliss and peace of mind, rather than to the classical categories of narration (events, distinct protagonists, progression of time and achievements).[23] Categories themselves, in a general manner, are right from the beginning blurred out.

The whole narration in *Dūsrā na koī* indeed aims at discarding the limit allowing for distinctive notions, so that there remains, at the end, no difference (*farq, antar*) between here and there, he and I, before and after, outside and inside. For instance, when the narrator attempts to measure the age of his partner:

> वह उम्र में मुझसे मुझे बहुत बड़ी नज़र आती है। शायद दुगनी या तिगनी। या कम-अज़-कम इतनी बड़ी कि यक़ीनन मेरी माँ हो सके और शायद मेरी नानी या दादी। यह बात दूसरी है कि देखने में शायद मैं अगर उसका बाप नहीं तो कम-अज़-कम बड़ा भाई या बूढ़ा पति या प्रेमी ही नज़र आता हूँ। (पृ. ११)
>
> [T]o me she looks much older than me, in fact twice or even thrice as old as I am. Old enough to be my mother or even grandmother. Paternal or maternal. Which is not to deny that, to me, I look old enough to be her older brother or her ancient lover. If not her father or her grandfather.[24]

Trying to visualize the age of both partners along these tracks obviously leads to think the unthinkable, somewhat as in Esher's paintings where an object starts developing into another one, which itself ends up transforming into the first one, hence building a path which is a path into otherness and into sameness at the same time, where the very distinction between otherness (alterity) and identity becomes irrelevant. Similarly reversible is the relation between "I" and his parents ("I am indistinguishable in my mind from my father and my mother," p. 53).

Metaphors too appear as a way for making notional borders indistinct. The narrator's nails are as limp as the flesh (p. 3). His skull is at the same time a "rotten soft papaya" and "hardened by years of head beating so that it is impregnable as a rock" (p. 97): both similes obviously rule out each other, making it impossible to reach for the referent and name reality. Similarly, the narrator, circling his neck with his hands, has the impression he holds his penis or the neck of a chicken, he sees himself as

23 VAID, 1978:29.
24 VAID, 1992:6.

variously auto-exclusive beings (an old spider, a goat man, because of the surrounding excrements, etc.). He is unable to make the difference between his feet or his belly, the liquid oozing from his eyes is neither tears nor blood but still evokes blood tears. This whole process of metaphoric, along with hypothetic, counterfactual or negative reformulations,[25] amounts to casting a doubt on the very opposition of clear-cut categories. Since differentiation and distinct categories are the only warrant of stable identities, the very notion of character vanishes as well as the possibility of rational judgment (which also requires categoriality in the classical theories of judgement).

Significantly, the only character really opposed to the narrator, his hereditary enemy (*janm se duśman*), which structures the narrative because he is the opponent, finally becomes indistinguishable too from "I". The contrasts between both "I" and "he" become more and more uncertain:

> हालांकि अब हमारी उम्र इतनी ज़्यादा हो चुकी है और हमारी सूरतें इतनी खस्ता कि कोई तीसरा शायद ही सरसरी नज़र में यह बाता सके कि वह कौन है और मैं कौन हूँ, कि बोल कौन रहा है और सोच कौन रहा है, कि इस मकान कौन मालिक है और मुलाक़ाती कौन है। कोई तीसरा इस वक़्त कहीं खड़ा हमें देख रहा होता तो शायद यह भी सोच सकता था कि हम में से एक खड़ा कुछ गा रहा है और दूसरे बैठा-बैठा उस धुन पर नाच रहा है। (पृ. ४८)
>
> By now our ages have reached that enormity and our faces that anonymity that no observer, howsoever keen, will be able to tell at a glance who is who, or who is speaking and who thinking, or who is the owner of the house and who the visitor. Had there been a hidden observer, he might have thought he was singing while I was dancing, weirdly, to his tune. (p. 36)

And at the end of the novella comes the point "where the difference between he and me becomes negligible" (p. 74), and "although I have not been able to decide so far whether he is or not, whether I am or not," says the narrator, he finally crosses the bridge with him, to fly in the open sky, free, blissful ("now we are soaring in one form", p. 105).[26]

25 Such as the recurring structures "X, if we may call it X" ("dwelling in this house, if we can call it a house, if we can call that dwelling"), or, "had there been a X".

26 अब मैं उस हद् के आगे बढ़ जाने को हो रहा हूँ जिसके बाद शायद उसका और मेरा आपसी भेद नज़र औझल हो जाए। अब हम एक आकार होकर उड़ रहे हों … उड़ान और ऊँची होती जा रही है … अब मैं

What is this bridge from where all distinctions vanish, where there is no longer discrimination "between pain and panacea, between ordinary and extraordinary, between anything and nothing" (p. 74)? This bridge is, the mentor suggests, the point where the great void (*mahāśūnya*, p. 99) gets visible, this great void the narrator has been aspiring at since the beginning. A point he sporadically reaches, when discovering that at his age belonging "nowhere" and not belonging "here" get identified (p. 7), then later that being nowhere and here identifies (p. 83), as well as here and there, outside and inside, "upstairs and downstairs": "I have reached a point where death and life are one" (p. 80). Blurring the frontiers between different notions and categories by various textual devices, that is to say blurring differential limits themselves, results in this narrative achievement of finding freedom and bliss in the great void, in conformity with the narrator's quest, both as a writer and as a character. The narrator manages to literally construct infinity by deconstructing finite limitations.

But the emptiness, the great void at the end, resulting from the vanishing of differential categories and referential mimesis in general, although its narrative elaboration in *Dusrā na koī* somewhat evokes Beckett's nihilist quest out of the given categories of narration and judgement, owes little to Western existentialism. The great void or emptiness, *mahāśūnya,* is an Indian concept, and the metaphysic or mystic path Vaid achieves with modern stylistic devices is an Indian one, the quest for *mokṣa*, repeatedly emphasized with its modern names (*chuṭkāṛā*, sometimes *āzādī*) as the narrator's major goal. The feeling of bliss (*ānand*) and freedom he experiments at the end when merging in the great void is also repeatedly conveyed in the narrator's favorite song, *dūsrā na koī*, "there is none other," a *pad* from Mirabai which is deemed important enough to be the title of the Hindi novella. In Mira the absolute is Krishna, there is no other than Him, and the goal of the devotee is to merge in the absolute embodied by Krishna. Its first occurrence at the end of the first chapter ironically concludes the love affair. At this stage, the words of the mantra, repeated during the whole day, generate a feeling of freedom although they represent the "essence of my angst". The narrator has forgotten the other half of the verse, only remembers the

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एक अजनबी आकाश में उड रहा हूँ। (पृ. १३५-१३६). See p. 69 for an anticipation of that state: महसूस होता है कहीं हवा में उड रहा होऊँ.

tune and enjoys it so much that he gives up the idea of looking for the forgotten integral text. The second occurrence of the song echoes the feeling of liberation experienced when he stops perceiving a difference between upstairs and downstairs (p. 68). At this stage he peacefully registers the absence of any other one who could supposedly arrange things, conveying through Mira's *pad* an agnostic mysticism, with a simple statement: no other, no discriminating limit, and no differential feature. A statement which associates with intense jubilation at the end of the story, when he and I are soaring "in one form" into the emptiness. The merging of I and he is concomitant with the fading of spatial categories (here and there, nowhere/anywhere/here, up and down) and temporal categories: the very frames of classical narration are eroded, while at the same time the feature "exile" (belonging nowhere) with no stable identity (a dubious "I"[27] unable to fit into any opposition, since "he" is equally dubious) gets its full meaning: rootless-ness (belonging nowhere) is depicted as a state of exile from the indistinct fusion with the cosmic emptiness, the absolute principle, the blissful state of non separateness which is obtained at the end of the novella. This state, beyond differentiating tensions, is equated with peace *(śānti*) and freedom, itself equated with detachment as the path towards peace, a leitmotiv in the story right from the beginning.

Besides, this explicit nostalgia for the state beyond differences, the fusionnal state of the *saṃnyās*, is mapped in the multiple frame of the bhakti reference (with *nirguṇtā* as the asymptotic line which tends to blur every clear qualification), the many popular traditions of *vairāgya* or "absolute detachment," and Sufism, as well as the classical philosophy of aesthetics, particularly the *śānta-rasa*, the mood of tranquillity or peace.

27 With "a face so unreliable".

2.2. Voicing the "fundamental questions" from paradox to dissemination

As stated in the very beginning of *Bimal urf jāeṁ to jāeṁ kahāṁ*,[28] what is at stake for the author in literary language is how to grasp at the always elusive "fundamental questions" of the human mind. And K. B. Vaid does so by means of seemingly word-plays, negative syntax (counter assertions, de-assertions, re-assertions in the mood of probability of doubt), humor, derision, all such devices bound to maintain open all contradictory alternatives without any *Aufhebung* of the contradictions. Yet the paronomastic play on sonorities, whether the phonetic closeness discloses unusual semantic relations between the terms in alliteration or it sets an ironical echo on the first one. The initial page itself deals with the question of the beginnings in a play with no beginning (no end, no middle[29]):

> Should I begin with the illusion (*bhram*) or with the creator (*brahm*)? By the action (*kārya*) or the cause (*kāraṇ*)? By the caused (*kartāram*) or the non-caused (*akartāram*)? By the act (*karm*) or the affect (*marm*)? By the pain (*āh*) or the desire (*cāh*)? By time (*samay*) or space (*sthān*)? By music (*rāg*) or disease (*rog*)? By penance (*tap*) or heat (*tāp*)? By the here (*idhar*) or the there (*udhar*)? By *Shiva* (*śiv*) or corpse (*śav*)? By *aum* or ego (*aham*)? By baby (*śiśu*) or sex (*śiśn*)? By the character (*pātr*) or the reader (*pāṭhak*)?

The fact that the signified engenders itself out of the playful moves of the signifier, a device so characteristic of Vaid, is not an empty play totally cut off from the signified. Conjoining and levelling such notions as *bhram* "illusion" and *brahm* "*brahman*, absolute principle," or *aum* and *aham* "ego," or even *śiv* and *śav* "corpse," *śiśu* "baby" or *śiśn* "sex," may act as simple irreverence or blaspheme or obscenity used to shock the reader-partner. But shocking the reader is rarely an empty provocation in K.B. Vaid's creation. It makes the reader aware of new viewpoints outside the beaten track of ordinary associations and cogni-

28 VAID, 1997. A popular "filmi geet," which humorizes the absurd quest of the hero (Bimal, alias Should-we-go-then-where-should-we-go), translated by *Bimal in Bog* in the English version of the novella.

29 A reminiscence of the classical (Vedantic or Upanishadic) way of characterizing the absolute principal.

tive patterns. The pair *āh* and *cāh* for instance, seemingly equating opposites, makes it suddenly perceptible that there is pain in desire made synonymous with the longing for the never reached; *rāg* as the song of the soul is not without affinities with *rog* as the incurable irretrievable pain and sickness of life itself. As for the pun on *tap/tāp*, "penance/heat," it is a classical association in the Indian tradition, which the modern writer Anupam Mishra has recently refreshed in an interesting way to show the relation between the perfection of the self through the right mental attitude and the heat in the Thar desert.[30] Complementary pairs such as *pātr* and *pāṭhak*, "character" and "reader," where the initial sound acts as a leader sound for the second term, or *karm* and *marm*, "act" and "affect", are more expected when starting a narrative, as well as time and space, but the other alternatives too are relevant for Vaid's framing into a narrative the fundamental questions. Here, words are delivered in the relationship they themselves build when put into pairs, the phonetic proximity disclosing the less visible affinities, and making them, by this device, appear in a different, unusual way. The surprise, here, is a way of creating wonder (*adbhut*), a quality achieved elsewhere, for instance in *Dūsrā na koī*, by freeing the words from linear syntax and dropping them as separate units[31]: there, in the strange sequence where the "I" delivers his ultimate message before flying into the great void, discarding the eventuality that others might find it difficult to understand, about 20 words stand in isolation (although in this sequence too the phonetic substance largely accounts for their succession), including grammatical words like "if," "but," "perhaps," "or," etc. Words are unbound, a very extra-ordinary disposition. This disposition makes each word and concept reverberate, because of isolation, like musical notes in the beginning of an *ālāp*,[32] each of them reverberating and showing the

30 *Rājasthān kī rajat būṁdeṁ*, New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation. Heat is necessary for the earth to be properly cooked and be fertile, as in a sacrifice, and the traditional people welcome it as a grace.

31 Wonder (*vismay, adbhut*) as well as serenity (*śam, śānti*) are, as a matter of fact, the preferred *rasa* and permanent emotions (*sthāyi bhāva*) in the Sanskrit 12th century theoretician Abhinavagupta because they subsume all other, particularly the latter (GNOLI, 1968).

32 The first part of a *rāg*, with only syllables uttered and lengthily worked out for the sake of themselves, before the rhythm and melody are set.

whole spectrum of its semantic latitudes, in a way ordinary syntax never allows for: disclosing its own potential of wonder.[33] Creating in this way the supra-ordinary is a better denial of ordinariness (*māmūliyat*) and linear thinking than any discursive argumentation. And in Vaid's creation, the denial of ordinariness stands for freeing one's mind from the social or intellectual conditionings which rule out any spiritual and intellectual quest.

The general denial of distinctiveness, a property inherent to language categories, but which may be subverted by the music of the words, rhythm or material sonority, is echoed in Vaid by the favorite thematic of the empty road leading towards the suspension of contradictions and abolition of differences, ending eventually nowhere or in the great void. In the story "Merā duśman" ("The Mortal Enemy"),[34] the two protagonists, opposed and similar like the "I" and the "he" of *Dūsrā na koī*, end up leaving the home of ordinariness together on the empty road leading to nowhere – to somewhere unthinkable and indicible. In one sequence of "Sair ke sāthī," another story, the narrator starts delivering his very personal confession to an unknown lady, and when she then delivers hers, she voices it in exactly the same words as his, so that he is listening to his own voice coming from the other character. But nowhere better than in the theatre plays and *Lila*, a novella, does this use of repetition better prove to shake the distinctive categories of identity. Lila and "I" in the dialogue sequence – structured as a theatrical dialogue – differ on all standards, she advocating the ordinary life and he advocating the quest for something he does know himself but which is different, extraordinary, and essentially elsewhere, for instance at the end of that never-ending empty road he likes to explore every evening. At the end of the novella, "I" realizes that all the differences have vanished, and for a long sequence speaks the very words Lila was speaking in the beginning, while Lila is speaking the words "I" was speaking in the beginning. Far from being a love fusion, since there is a symmetric shift and not a fu-

33 Such a disposal also echoes the Freudian unbound energies associated with the "oceanic feeling" characteristic of mystical or passion states, and with the economics of libido previous to the symbolic stage which allows for the construct of a separate ego (beginning of *Civilization and its Discontents*, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle").

34 In VAID, 1999.

sion into a common identity, this reversibility is also one of the favorite stylistic devices of K.B. Vaid's theatrical creations, one of the means for reaching out beyond identity categories.[35]

That is why I considered essential in my task as a translator to respect both the repetitions and sharpness of the paradoxical writing, as well as the specific meandering style of the sentences loaded with de-assertions and counter-assertions, without "oiling" the text into a more "legible" and marketable piece of writing. My reading and understanding of Vaid for translating the great novel on Partition should of course be induced by the nature of the text, which is far more realistic than the "metaphysical" novellas but still voices similar undertones, in a more explicitly Gandhian stand (with the images of a Pakistani Surdas or a Hindu fakir, or a childish old man bent over his walking stick as he wanders across borders …).

Conclusion

Translation is not critical analysis. Explaining a text and writing it again in a different language are altogether different practices. And a good translation is not necessarily authored by a good critic – nor is a good translator necessarily a good critic. Yet in order to properly translate, one must enjoy the text for what it is really (maybe a form of informal, non-articulate critic?) and not for self identification purposes or dubious ideological or sociological agenda. I think one must be a *rasika* with the text before and while trying to render its very *ras* into another language – in my case contemporary French, a rendering which implies one is also a *rasika* with other great texts of one's own literary tradition. This is of

35 In *Parivār akhāṛā* (2002), a play on family life and struggle, the mother, quarreling with the father, at a given time reiterates word to word the discourse of the father, and conversely, the children (one single character) so end up at a given moment speaking the phrases of the mother or the father and conversely, and similarly the character called Dūsre (Others, again one single character). Interestingly, there is also one character called Void (*śūnya*).

course especially true for those texts and authors who have a marked style of their own, like Nirmal Verma and Krishna Baldev Vaid.[36]

Last, but not least for the translator's programs, always plural: the general concepts of non-modernity are certainly not exclusively Indian nor even Eastern.[37] As Edward Said once remarked, this "other" which the colonial discourse has constructed into the image of the non-West has once been part of the medieval European consciousness. Although it is far more present and still vivacious in India than in Europe in spite of the internalization of the Western model of modernity there, it may not have completely been uprooted in Europe itself and this is why reading and translating Hindi great literary works today in Europe is also maintaining alive this part of our non-modern selves and resisting to the brutal face of the postmodern market.

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36 It may well be not true at all for those text which cultivate what Barthes called the "degree zero" of writing.

37 Non-modern is a phrase coined by NANDY, 1998 in order to avoid the dichotomy modern / premodern (and we can add postmodern).

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