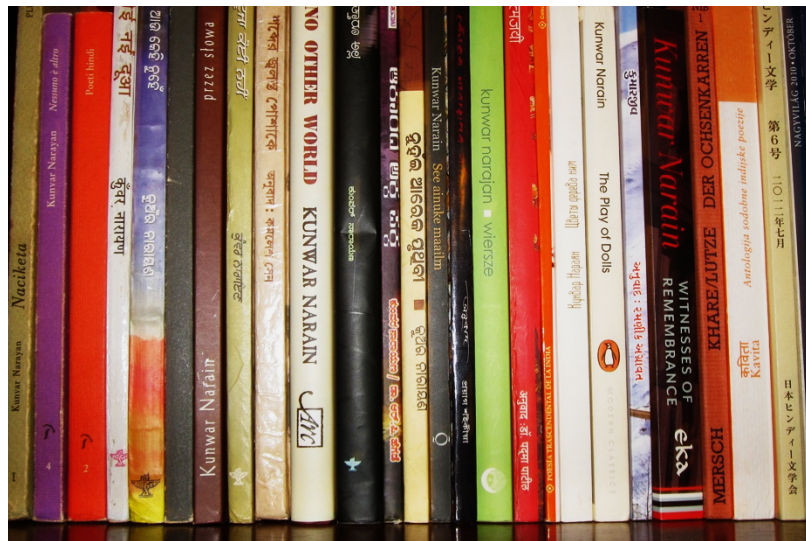


ABSTRACTS

So Far, Yet So Close. Kunwar Narain's Poetry in Translation



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Prof. Annie MONTAUT

INALCO, Paris (France)

History, Geography, Mythology: Passages to Humanness

The poetry of Kunwar Narain has been rightly described as “dwelling on the present through the prism of myth and history” (Apurva Narain, introduction of *No Other World*). A sentence with various readings: Is this present the actual transient present, distinct from the eternal present of myth as well as from the past of history? Or is it like an immanent transcendence, distinct from the transcendence of myth and from the immanence of history? Kunwar Narain’s poems indeed allow both interpretations in their quest of humanity, a complex negotiation with tradition, “redefined” in order to free the self from “the pressure of ancient past”, while anchoring it in its spiritual habitat, as suggested by the very title of one of his essays. As for myth and history, usually regarded as mutually antagonist, they merge in Kunwar Narain’s world into

“the map of the entire world
and man’s entire history” (“The Qutab’s Precinct”),

a place where writers fully belong: The same poem questions the distinctness of time and space, chronologies, clear cut boundaries by neighbouring Kafka’s Prague and the Red fort’s Diwan-e-khas, up to the discovery of

“a new riddle of Amir Khusro
connecting
to the chronicle of the arts, another link.”

Connectedness is central in Kunwar Narain’s quest for humanness, whether it hyphens land and sky in “bridg[ing] the I and the other nearby” (Falcon), uses myth to explore the modern fractures of mind and society, life and death (*Ātmajayī* 1965, *Vājaśravā ke bahāne* 2008), or uses the figure of an ancient Buddhist translator in between India and China (*Kumārajīva* 2015). I will focus on the latter, both the final achievement in the author’s literary career and a tribute, in an almost minimalist language, to translation as a linking process—a step towards humanness.

Prof. Angela SANMANN-GRAF

Univ. of Lausanne (Switzerland)

Beyond the Concept of Loss and Gain: Positions, Strategies and Perspectives in Poetry Translation

There's hardly any other literary genre provoking more controversial debates about translatability than poetry: a huge number of either pessimistic or optimistic views are diametrically opposed to each other. Famous sayings like "Poetry is what is lost in translation" (Robert Frost) or "Poetry is what is gained in translation" (Joseph Brodsky) only mark the extreme poles of the discussion. Roman Jakobson even excludes the practice of rendering poetry into another language from the field of translation by naming it a "creative transposition".

The role of the translator (or "creative transposer"?) is heavily disputed as well: Does a good translator of poetry have to be a poet him- or herself or do the so-called "poet-translators" such as Rainer Maria Rilke, tend to impose their own poetic devices on the translated poem? Against this background, transposing poems that are deeply embedded in specific cultural and historical contexts, seems to be the most difficult task of all.

In my talk, I will discuss different positions and strategies in the handling of poetry crossing linguistic and cultural borders in order to shed light on new and experimental forms of translating and editing poetry, in the web as well as in print. These new forms are nourished by a will to overcome the traditional opposition of loss and gain in translation, by emphasizing the individual approach of each translator instead.

Dr Nicola POZZA

Univ. of Lausanne (Switzerland)

Between WorLds: Kunwar Narain's Poetry Across Cultures and Languages

In the introduction to their book *Translation, History and Culture*, Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (1990) write, "Since languages express cultures, translators should be bicultural, not bilingual." In the case of culturally charged texts (or poems in our situation), this fundamental aspect of translation raises the consequent question of the expected cultural knowledge of their readers. In other words, what should the translator do with the cultural components of a poem, all the more when they remain implicit? To what extent and in which form should s/he include them in the translated text, without endangering the poetic dimension of the source text? Behind these practical and editorial aspects, lies the implicit, but no less important, epistemic and ethical question of the multipolar power relations between cultures (Antoine Berman), the one(s) behind the source text and its "model reader" (Umberto Eco), and the one(s) potentially attributed to the reader of the translated version.

In our case, this implies, firstly, looking at the nature of the cultural components Kunwar Narain has included in his poems and, secondly, thinking about the way his translator should transmit them to the future readers. To explore these questions and analyse the choices I have made for my French translation of Kunwar Narain's poems, I will use a selection of poems as case studies: (i) poems containing both Indian and non-Indian references, (ii) poems dealing with a "specifically Indian" context, either explicitly or implicitly, and (iii) poems with a few Indian culture-bound words evoking, however, a sense of "universality" or a "humanesque" (Apurva Narain) feeling and message.

Prof. Danuta STASIK

Univ. of Warsaw (Poland)

“Translation as Challenge...”: A Few Thoughts on Translating Poems of Kunwar Narain

The beginning of the title of Paul Ricoeur’s essay (1997/2006), referred to in the title of my paper, is meant to serve as a conceptual frame of this presentation in which translation is conceived as challenge, an open-ended process of decision making.

I propose a case study informed by my own experience in translating Kunwar Narain’s poems selected from collections published over the years 1956–2009 (Narain 2013). The core of my analysis will basically be guided by Stanisław Barańczak’s thought-provoking, and provocative, *A Small but Maximalist Translatological Manifesto* (1990/2020), in which he critically approaches the issue of “‘faithfulness’ to the original meaning”. He argues that “the basic issue is what exactly we recognize in the poetic work as the domicile or vector of meaning... the factor that creates meaning”. He introduces the category of the “semantic dominant” that forms the basis of the model of poetry translation and defines it as “the primacy of a defined element of the work’s structure that constitutes the more or less perceptible key to the totality of its meanings.”

Following critically Barańczak’s ideas, and referring to other authors theories, first I share my observations on the selection and the decision-making process motivated by the semantic dominants of individual poems. Secondly, I try to distinguish between them those (1) motivated by language (the source language – Hindi, and the target language – Polish), and (2) motivated by culture (Indian vs. Western/European/Polish).

This analysis seeks to explicate the specific elements determining the meaning of Kunwar Narain’s poetry but it is hoped that it can also let us better understand what in particular makes translation a process of consequential decision making, aimed at “a choice of the least evil” (Barańczak), which is a real challenge for any translator and not always a “source of happiness” (Ricoeur)...

Prof. Milena BRATOEVA

Sofia Univ. "St. Kliment Ohridski" (Bulgaria)

Translation as Negotiation: Challenges of Rendering Kunwar Narain's Poetry into Bulgarian

Sharing Umberto Eco's notion that the good translation is similar to "a process of negotiation" (2003), I will try to address some challenges emerging while translating certain poems of Kunwar Narain from Hindi into Bulgarian. The point of departure of the current analysis is the understanding that the culture-oriented translation should mediate between the source and the target text in such a way as to create an aesthetically relevant and meaningful interaction between their very often radically different cultural worlds. In the translation process the original text should not only be made accessible to the readership in the target language, but also turned into a vehicle of an effective intercultural communication. Therefore, the translation activity is a kind of "negotiation" according to Eco "by virtue of which, in order to get something, each party renounces something else" (ibid.: 129).

The paper is focused on my "negotiation" with Narain in the process of translating his poems *Cakravūh*, *Ayodhyā* 1992, *Pavitratā*, *Nadī ke kināre*, *Pānī kā svād*, *Pānī kī pyās*, *Śūnya aur aśūnya*, *Pahle bhī āyā hūm*. The study aims at:

- introducing the main criteria behind my selection of exactly these poems to be translated into Bulgarian;
- highlighting the most significant characteristics and basic patterns of the cultural approach to translation I have chosen as theoretical background of my interpretation;
- discussing some problems and challenges concerning the communicative capacity of the translated text in the target-culture determined by a set of extratextual conditions and factors (socio-cultural situation, knowledge, worldview, value system, etc.), distinguishing the "world of the source-text" from the "world of the target-text".

Margus LATTIK

Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn (Estonia)

Inbetween the Personal and Universal: Place and Location in Kunwar Narain's Poetry

Beyond its function of introducing a piece of literature from one language and culture to another, translation is simultaneously a form of close reading that serves to enrich the translator's own insights and perspectives on literature and life. This paper will present, in a rather personal manner, some aspects of how working on Kunwar Narain's poetry has impacted my own views as well as writing, and in particular delve into his treatment of 'place' and 'location', examining what means do his poems employ to convey their personal or general setting. Exploring poems like "Flowers of Neem", "In the Park", "Fatehpur Sikri", "My Intimate Neighbour" and several others, the paper will view how, regardless of its implicitness or explicitness, place is always of relevance to the poem's meaning and the reader-writer communication in Narain's work. The paper will also discuss what difficulties – and opportunities – may the author's more implicit geographical references present to a translation as far removed from their original context as the one in Finno-Ugric Estonian. Narain's poetics rarely operate in the realm of abstraction or impersonal void, but rather root themselves in the generous soil of home and language, so as to spread out from there to various dimensions of time and receptivity.

Apurva NARAIN

New Delhi (India)

Evolving Paradigms in the Poetry of Kunwar Narain: Imperatives for Translation

Treading through more and more of Narain's writing, one senses the evolution of larger worldviews—with paradigmatic resonances that can go beyond a poem or work. I alluded to this in *Witnesses of Remembrance* and *The Play of Dolls*, and vaguely via the neologism 'humanesque' in *No Other World*. This is a subject for research on Narain, with a larger ambit than this paper's—but, based on examples from these books, I will touch upon what sort of exigencies this might pose for translation.

I use 'paradigm' in the sense of Kuhn in the philosophy of science, but also for 'a way of life', 'a way of seeing'. The idea of the self and other as abodes for each other; the continuums of mind-reality, life-death, animate-inanimate, time-place... that frequent Narain's work; the transactional basis of human progress that begets hierarchy, entrapment and exploitation; the moral value of a gentle, even anonymous, outlook; the *live* presence of history, myth or fantasy in his work... are all elements of this larger emergent construct. How does one evoke them in a translation, even if occasionally, without conceding a poem's specificity? For one, "the quiddities of individual poems must not eclipse a sense of the larger worldviews being constructed, and vice versa... (requiring) a certain precision with choosing words that evoked, rather than blurred, a multiplicity of intents." (*Witnesses...*)

'Words' and 'intent' are both important in Narain. A poem's intent—in its most generous, essential sense—must not be lost by a translator working, so to say, with hands tied. For me, this has often meant looking at the poem first—its wider, deeper evocations—than a tenet. Narain's own eclecticism—embracing varied literatures, languages and disciplines—is a relevant inspiration. Seeking the valuable or harmonious across diversities, rather than dwelling on discords, is a way for him—and can be a way for his translator. Thus, Benjamin's idea that the original often "contains the law governing the translation" or Ramanujan's idea of a translator as "an artist on oath" can both be germane to translating the metanarratives in Narain's poetry; even if the two differ in their theoretical formulations on translation.

Prof. Alessandra CONSOLARO

Univ. degli studi di Torino (Italy)

***Kumārajīva*, Kunwar Narain, and I: A Dialogue on Translation**

In this paper, I introduce my Italian translation of the epic poem *Kumārajīva* by Kunwar Narain, published in 2015. It is an extended poem on the fourth-century monk, traveler, and translator Kumarajiva, who lived between the 4th-5th century and literally transformed a whole culture through translation, playing an important role in introducing Buddhism to China. Kunwar Narain's previous epic works *Ātmajayī* (1965, Self-conqueror) and *Vājaśravā ke bahāne* (2008, On Vajashrava's Pretext) deal specifically with existential issues. These are present in the more recent poem as well, as it presents the life and philosophy of Kumarajiva who spent a long time in captivity of a Chinese warlord, meditating upon the meaning of life. The poem has, moreover, a focus on scholarly work and transcultural creativity, which makes it a wonderful intellectual challenge for a translator. In my presentation I address some issues regarding the Italian translation, thinking of them as a dialogue between Kumarajiva, Kunwar Narain, and "I", which is meant both as the poetic first person in the poem and my presence in the process of translation.

Prof. Heinz WERNER WESSLER

Uppsala Univ. (Sweden)

The Modest Messenger: Kunwar Narain and his *Kumārajīva*

Kunwar Narain composed three long poems (*lambī kavītāeṃ*), sometimes also referred to as epic poems (*khaṇḍ-kāvya*). *Ātmajayī* (1965) is based on the famous narration of the Naciketas of the *Kāthopaniṣad*. *Ātmajayī*'s Naciketas is a modern spiritual and intellectual seeker, shaken by the confrontation with death. Four decades later, Narain takes up this thread again in his long poem *Vājaśravā ke bahāne* (2008). This time, Naciketas' father Vajashrava is in the center of the drama. The issue raised in the earlier long poem turns up again, but instead of going further in time, Narain turns to the generation earlier and follows his subject of modern man's existential crisis in an alliteration typical for Narain: the poet (*kavi*) and his poem (*kavitā*) are to be found "at an undefined place (*kahīm bhī*).

His third long poem, *Kumārajīva* (published 2015, composed between 2005 and 2015) is composed as a kind of poetic autobiography of the famous interlocutor between Indian and Chinese Buddhism and director of the famous school of translation in Ch'ang-an, the historical Kumarajiva (343/344-413 AD) of Kucha in Central Asia.

Like Naciketas and Vajashrava, Narain's Kumarajiva is, on one side, the prototype of man and his never-ending quest for truth. At the same time, Narain's Kumarajiva is a global citizen, born outside of the Indian subcontinent, but at home in an Indian language and religion. Kumarajiva is the prototypical translator, communicating the Buddhist message in an intercultural context researcher, translator, knower, and commentator (*adhyetā-anuvādak-jñātā aur vyākhyātā*), but not teacher (*upadeśak*, p.59). The Chinese language is equal in sweetness (*mādhurya*) as Sanskrit (*ibid.*).

I will go into problems of my German translation with a focus on the tension between the references on the historical, the existential and the contemporary of this extraordinary sample of epic poetry in modern Hindi literature.

Maria PURI

Delhi (India)

(Un)veiling the Poem, (Un)veiling the Self: On Translating Kunwar Narain's *Ātmajayī* into English

Speaking of translating texts from different (read exotic) cultural milieus for global readership, Spivak (2012: 202) underlines the need for personal engagement and culturally sensitive approach, by calling translation the 'most intimate act of reading'. My work on English rendering of Kunwar Narain's long poem, *Ātmajayī* ("Self-Conqueror", 1965), a modern retelling of the story of Naciketas from *Kaṭhopaniṣad*, proved to be a deeply personal engagement with the poet who, while revisiting in our conversations the making of the poem and its afterlife, allowed me a glimpse of his writerly persona and the self behind the writer. Using the framework of "double-scope blending" (Turner 2003) to follow the many threads of this writer-translator engagement, I would like to offer some insights into my translatorial habitus (Simeoni 1998), with focus on issues such as the need to keep in mind the interrelation between content and form while translating poetry (Sullivan 2019); the importance of locating key words and rendering them consistently throughout (e.g. *dharm*, *dhārmik*, *vidharm*, *vidharmī*, *nāstiktā*, *miṭṭī*, etc.); problems relating to the translation of the title (the journey from *ātmā* as *soul* to *ātmā* as *self*); poetic licence and new coinage (e.g. *ḍṛṣyākṣep* / *distorted*, *hazy scene*; *Ātmajayī* 1965: 66); urge to annotate versus no-footnotes approach (e.g. how does one deal with quotations from *Kaṭhopaniṣad* used as epigrams in the chapters); and ways of bringing out in translation the universal in a story rooted in the particular, with specific cultural backdrop. As is evident from author's Introduction and numerous personal conversations, Kunwar Narain never meant the poem to be read as a mere retelling of an old myth but rather his personal contribution to an ongoing debate on modern human condition, like Camus's use of the Sisyphus myth or Joyce's Ulysses. Keeping this in mind, my translatorial self sees the publication of the English translation, ideally in a bilingual edition, a translation informed by author's personal inputs, as bringing this specific Hindi discourse onto anglophone scene and providing a possible template for other language renderings (Freely 2013:120).

Péter SÁGI

Eötvös Loránd Univ. [ELTE], Budapest (Hungary)

Challenges on the way to a Hungarian *Ātmajayī*

Kunwar Narain's poetry demands readers' attention, not only by the themes he discusses but because of his diction. I chose his immensely imaginative work, *Ātmajayī* for translation into Hungarian as his moral stance and the metaphysical questions he raises and answers with an original blend of old Indian philosophical traditions may leave a deep impression on sensitive minds in any society and through any language.

Kunwar Narain's poetry is of the kind which forces the reader to pay added attention to each word and word-play, each sound and rhyme, to every line-break, spacing and tabulation. It urges us to recognize them in the right place. In my presentation I would like to highlight the locations seemingly most challenging to convey in *Ātmajayī*. Some expressions are so much infused with Indian notions that it seems vain to render them in their entirety in another tongue, such as *maryādā*, carrying the basic sense of one's limits, making us call to mind *Maryādā-purushottam* Rama, and still eventually meaning virtue. Is it possible to retain word order to befit a new language or to keep up the ambiguity of subject and object, or the narrator and (his) possessions in elliptic sentences? Can we tackle rhymes like the one with *sindhu* and *bindu*, where both components may be taken in double meaning? Perhaps not in all cases, nevertheless an interpreter may at least raise awareness among prospective readers towards such musings and their importance in an accompanying essay.

Dr Monika BROWARCZYK

Adam Mickiewicz Univ. in Poznań (Poland)

The Wonderland of Words: Strategies and ‘Creative (In)correctness’ in Translation of Kunwar Narain’s Poetry into Polish

A collection of Narain’s selected translations of world poetry published in 2017 proves his versatility as a poet-translator, it includes Homer, Cavafy, Borges, Walcott, and others, as well as some of Narain’s writings on translation. The volume contains poems by three Polish poets, some of which are collaborative translations done with help of native speakers. Narain observed that such a method offered “a closer glimpse into the structure of the original Polish poems, vis-a-vis their English translations”. He also underlined syntactic and semantic compatibility between Polish and Hindi. Narain’s observations on process of translation in general, and between Polish and Hindi in particular, will be a departure point for analysis of translation of his several poems into Polish. My theoretical framework is informed by Tymoczko and her appropriation of cultural contextualisation of translation as a practice of responsible rewriting. Drawing from “anisomorphisms of language and asymmetries of culture” and text-in-translation’s “contradictory demands that cannot be simultaneously satisfied”, Tymoczko (2010: 8) observes: “Translation is therefore a metonymic process, and translators make choices, setting priorities for their translations in decision-making processes that have ideological implications (...). At the same time because cultures are heterogeneous and include different perspectives on values and responsibility, translations are always potentially controversial (...).” The idea of this paper is to examine pitfalls of rendering Narain’s Hindi verses in Polish, as well as strategies and decisions made by translators to achieve their variants of ‘faithful’ rewriting of Narain’s poems in Polish.

Prof. Guzel STRELKOVA and Dr Anastasia GURIA

Moscow State Univ. (Russia)

Main features of Russian translations of Kunwar Narain's poetry

Poetic creations of Kunwar Narain deserve a great attention and love of their readers, translators, researchers. Russian translation of Kunwar Narain's selected poems titled "Tsvety dereva Nim" (Flowers of the Neeem tree) was fulfilled by G. Strelkova and A. Guria, published in 2014. It consists of 10 parts, 8 of which mainly correspond to chapters of the "No Other World"—English translation of Kunwar Narain's poetry published up to 2008. In Russian translation some poems and two additional parts ("Radiance" and "What Passes over the Years") were added. The book is based on 9 collections of Kunwar Narain's poetry. One of the problems was to choose verses for translation and maintain a balance between a desire to convey the features of this poetry as accurately as possible and to make Russian readers acquaint with the talent of Kunwar Narain, showing a wide panorama of his poetry and to explain Indian realities unfamiliar to them. Interactions and interrelations between linguistic and extra-linguistic features of this poetry were very important. Common literary motives (trees, flowers, travelling, history, religion) in the poet's poetry and prose helped to create wider dimensions, they have deep meanings and express lyrical emotions and colorfulness. The most complicated part was to explain typical Indian realities or historical matters mentioned or discussed in this poetry, and at the same time to reflect some emotional aspects or syntactic patterns, deep meanings and specific features of this poetry.

Nicolas BOIN PRINCIPATO

INALCO, Paris (France)

Translating Kunwar Narain's Humanism

The act of translating is at the core of the literary experience, be it in a translation between two languages or in the interpretation of a text. Understanding words' multiple layers of meaning is a challenge in itself, and this is especially true in the literary field. Because of its density and **hermetism**, poetry requires approaching words in a very specific manner in comparison to what is commonly done for other kinds of translation.

In order to reach an accurate poetic translation, we believe that integrating all the layers of meaning combined together by a poet as well as a deep understanding of the poet himself are required. Therefore, the translator's aim is not to reduplicate the poem's structure but to seize the vision that is behind it, thus enabling the (re-)creation of one strong unit of meaning also called the literary experience.

We noted that one of Kunwar Narain's main concern throughout his work has been, as he says himself, to "*make the alien dear*". Similarly, the aim of the translator would be to re-convey this feeling of newness felt through Narain's use of language and words. According to Narain, the need for acceptance of what is *alien*, in life as well as in literature, which he considers as intertwined, is essential because, from his point of view, life should be an *integrative* experience, and poetry's aim is to reflect it.

Kunwar Narain's work always comes back to a sense of belonging to a larger unity: emphasizing that beyond our earthly differences and beyond our distinct beliefs we are all part of the humankind. As we will show in this article, Kunwar Narain's poetry is embedded in a firm faith in humanity. This article's main focus will be to portray Kunwar Narain's vision of humanism through the illustration of some of his poems.

Teena AMRIT GILL

New Delhi (India)

Kunwar Narain's Poetry in the Audio-visual Media: Strategies for Intersemiotic Translation

The process of translating a poem from text into film is multi-semiotic, and works at various levels. As a visual artist, not only does one need to 'connect' deeply with the poem, the poem also needs to resonate with one's own intellectual, visual and oral sensibilities, and with the aesthetics of expression that constitute this art form.

Multiple translation strategies can be put to use in an intersemiotic translation. This presentation will look specifically at the use of "faithfulness, equivalence and rules of similarity" (Dusi), the strategy which organically suited the translation of two of Narain's history-inspired poems into film: 'located' in Golconda and Fatehpur Sikri. Fidelity, "not the resumption of word to word but of world to world" (Eco) seemed to suit the strategy here, both instinctively as well as contextually. These are 'on-site' poems, and I needed to visit these historical locations as the poet himself had done, to experience (and film) the atmosphere and mood of the locations. But, along with the evocativeness of the location, a visual translation also had to capture the complex (sometimes circular, sometimes inter-thematic) movements of time, memory, history and rhythm in these layered poems. Specific cinematic techniques in this context, such as panning, alternating monochromatic shots with colour, or the use of echoes, silence and music, will be discussed.