TRANSLINGUAL NOSTALGIAS IN MODERN SANSKRIT AND INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

BY

MATTHEW NELSON

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Waïl Hassan, Chair and Co-Director of Research
Professor Emerita Rajeshwari Pandharipande, Co-Director of Research
Assistant Professor Rini Mehta
Professor Michael Rothberg, University of California, Los Angeles

ABSTRACT

My dissertation finds postcolonial studies hampered by a narrow and misleading conception of nostalgia. Part of a broad set of European ideas about time and its passing, nostalgia arrived in the colonies first as a genre—proto-nationalist veneration of a supposed "golden age"—and later as a way of understanding that genre. That understanding focused on the metaphysics of nostalgia's desired object, finding it flawed. Because of this metaphysical focus and its limitations, what might have been a contingent critique of genre was generalized to include all forms of affective attachment to the past. Two consequences followed: postcolonial authors developed genres of decontextualized wrestling with nostalgia, and postcolonial critics missed or dismissed non-metaphysical modes of nostalgia. To get at what is thus missed, as well as to situate nostalgia more clearly within the affect worlds and genres of South Asia, my dissertation looks to language and translation as crucial sites of nostalgic work. This focus leads me away from the novel genre—postcolonial scholarship's usual focus—towards South Asian poetry, which maintains a more active multilingualism and a greater continuity with local tradition.

My dissertation begins by charting the genealogy of the nostalgia concept, from its Enlightenment origins to its use by postcolonial critics. Chapter 1 argues that the original work of A. K. Ramanujan represents, in the form of what I call nostalgic shame poems, a generic fulfillment of the postcolonial critique of nostalgia. Part of a wider body of works concerned with the status of homelands, Ramanujan's nostalgic shame poems rehearse the inaccessibility of the past. By contrast, his translations suggest a more productive form of nostalgia that is unworried by absolutes. Reading the translations of Ramanujan's poet-translator peers, Arun Kolatkar and Arvind Mehrotra, Chapter 2 argues that their generation contested and reshaped,

through their translingual nostalgias, the subcontinental aesthetics of English. Chapter 3 then provides a theoretical grounding for my literary-historical claims by turning to Agha Shahid Ali, whose attempts to write Urdu ghazal poetry in English uniquely evince nostalgia's inventive, non-dogmatic side. Finally, Chapter 4 turns to the linguistic pole furthest from English in the Indian nationalist imagination: Sanskrit. Contrary to popular perception, Modern Sanskrit continues to produce an ample but vastly understudied body of literature that invites us to rethink familiar debates about South Asian multilingualism as well as nostalgia. My dissertation closes by proposing that the pairing of English and Modern Sanskrit suggests that the concepts of language death and vitality map in unexpected ways on these languages, revealing the problematic status of each in a freshly illuminating manner.

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INTRODUCTION

By examining post-Independence poetry from India through a lens trained at the affective nexus of language, cultural memory, and poetic form, this dissertation argues that conventional accounts of nostalgia are insufficient to the postcolonial context. Postcolonial nostalgia is generally seen as a response to painful rupture with the past. The prevailing accounts that I seek to complicate focus on how the nostalgic response risks denying rupture altogether and installing in its place a ready-made nationalist fantasy. Instead, I propose that nostalgia relates to the past as diversely as translations relate to their originals. In each case, a source is mobilized only via its present interpretation in the receiving culture. Finding their languages tarnished by imperialism and its legacy, the poets I consider seek to rehabilitate them by creating a nostalgic space of translation where new alternatives can be born.

This dissertation discusses two bodies of literature, one in English and one in Sanskrit. These literatures do not, for the most part, interact directly. Indian poets writing in English as a rule take no active interest in poetry written in Sanskrit, except—as Chapter 2 will suggest—by distant way of negating the style of Indian English that was formed, among other ways, most notably via Orientalist translations of Classical Sanskrit texts during the colonial era. Small exceptions do occur, most notably in the case of Purushottama Lal (styled P Lal), the founder and publisher of the important Writers Workshop in Calcutta as well as an important translator from Classical Sanskrit. No major poet in English, however, has shown any awareness of the specifically modern poetry written in Sanskrit.[1] Modern writers in Sanskrit, by contrast, are

[1] That is, no major poet has spoken of it, explicitly or allusively. Poets are not unaware that Sanskrit continues to be used, however. Anjali Nerlekar, in her study of 1960's Bombay print culture, reproduces the cover page of one of the period's formative "little magazines," which

necessarily aware of the force exerted by English literature, including the possibility of Indian literature being written in English. On the whole, however, they show no particular interest in the specific texts produced in that other tradition. The image of English held dear by Modern Sanskrit writers remains overwhelmingly that of Shakespeare and Romantic poetry, i.e., the colonial cannon.

Despite the lack of direct interaction between these two traditions, this dissertation finds it useful to put them under the same critical lens—or perhaps more accurately, to use them jointly to fashion a new lens. Specifically, I argue that both traditions share preoccupations with translation, cultural memory, and nostalgia that distinguish them from their vernacular-language peers and that both arrive at those interests by way of a shared inheritance from colonial language ideology, Orientalism, and the aesthetics of modernism. The first three chapters will explore the more widely read poetry in English, looking at, successively, the impact on it of nostalgia discourse (the habitual concerns and frames we bring to bear in conversations about nostalgia), the reasons why nostalgia arises and why translation and translingual writing broadly are adequate responses to it, and finally what theory of nostalgia might be more adequate to it if our usual nostalgia discourse produces the effects described in Chapter 1. Then I turn to Modern Sanskrit as a foil to Indian poetry in English. My suggestion is that Modern Sanskrit's self-awareness of its death entails a kind of nostalgia that may productively be placed alongside that of Indian poetry in English.

The rest of this introduction lays out the key theoretical and scholarly debates into which my dissertation enters across three sections: on nostalgia, Indian literature in English, and

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displays writing in Sanskrit (in the form of a benedictory epigraph), Marathi, and Gujarati in easy juxtaposition (123).

Modern Sanskrit. The first two strive in relatively straightforward terms to rehearse where the field is and how my project intervenes within it. The section on Modern Sanskrit deviates somewhat from that pattern, given the relative lack of on-going scholarly conversation around it. Instead, it provides a synoptic look at the question of Sanskrit's purported "death" and the complications involved in either agreeing or disagreeing with that diagnosis.

NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia, as a word and as a phenomenon, is notoriously difficult to pin down. Fred Davis, a sociologist who helped pioneer its study, found the term itself "susceptible to semantic vagueness, drift, and ambiguity" (7). What to him seemed an obstacle, however, to others has been a tantalizing provocation to further study. Linda Austin's survey of nostalgia's long nineteenth century, for example, revels in the details of how it "appears to operate on the margins of all the disciplines it touches, violating the standards of each" (197). The lesson of both of these scholars' remarks should be context-sensitivity. "Nostalgia" is less a unified phenomenon than a space where disparate strands—of feelings, histories, and philosophies—meet and messily interweave only to depart again on new trajectories.

These days, nostalgia is a fairly ordinary word, no longer the jargon it once was. We are therefore likely to obscure more than we clarify if we should attempt rigorously to define it—i.e., to delimit its conceptual territory. As speakers of English, we already deploy the term with considerable flexibility and nuance, and in so doing we register, wittingly or not, the texture of a social world shaped by the histories we inherit as we learn our language—learn, that is, how to use a word like nostalgia (which is really any word at all). This dissertation takes for granted the Wittgensteinian slogan that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (*Philosophical Investigations §*43). Now, nostalgia, like most words, is put to a wide range of uses; but among

the most prominent are disparagement and a kind of cordoning off. We might, for example, disparage some cultural production as "mere nostalgia." Conversely, we might cordon off its enjoyment by saying that, while worthless in absolute terms, it was at least good for quick fix of nostalgia, meaning that it offered a "guilty pleasure" otherwise disconnected from the rest of our lives. I am interested in how we came to acquire these uses. If asked what the word means, we would likely say that it points to, say, a mood, an attitude, or a disposition. How did the name for one of those things come to do the work, at times, of disparagement? The answer to that question, I will suggest, reveals that we may do more than we intend when we invoke nostalgia as a kind of critical shorthand in postcolonial literary studies.

This dissertation is thus interested not only in the things nostalgia names but also in the name itself, or we might say, in the process of naming any given thing "nostalgic." In so distinguishing—between the name (or the naming) and the named—I do not wish to posit the existence of such a thing as nostalgia "out there," carrying on independently of our inadequate word. I am rather acknowledging that the uses of "nostalgia" sometimes diverge. Disparagement does not exhaust what we can do with the term. Accordingly, and with the caveat already given that any definition must be provisional, I offer a sense of what I most commonly mean by nostalgia in the dissertation to follow (when, that is, I am speaking in my own voice and not ventriloquizing others). Most broadly, I understand nostalgia to be the affective negotiation of an interruption of the present by a sense of familiarity lost, familiarity moreover that one knows of (at that moment) only through a gestalt of a past era or season. There is much to unpack in so dense a definition, but now is not the time. We will have to arrive cumulatively at a clearer sense of how these words are used as the dissertation progresses (I note in passing, however, that the early sections of Chapter 3 contain the most sustained theoretical explication of the concept on

offer; eager readers would be obliged to turn there). First we need to understand how we came to need a definition in the first place, i.e., how we came to have any such word as nostalgia *to* define. I offer the following synopsis of the term's history not in a spirit of exhaustiveness, but in order to tease out five key historical threads that tie into aspects of our lexicon today (and hence aspects of the world we use it in and on).

"Nostalgia" first entered our world as a diagnostic tool.[2] Johannes Hofer introduced the term in a 1688 Swiss medical dissertation that sought to make sense of the curious behavior of some Swiss mercenaries—long notorious as the hardiest and most sought-after of Europe's soldiers—who were utterly debilitated by what seemed an inexplicable longing for home. Hofer found that, for the most part, the only cure for this gripping disorder was for the soldiers actually to return to the country of their youth. Not returning could be fatal. Being a dissertation, Hofer's theory was naturally quite nuanced and elaborate; and being a s*eventeenth-century* dissertation, it can all seem quite foreign to us now. Consequently, I will not rehearse the details. Interested readers can turn to the excellent intellectual history offered by Helmut Illbruck in his *Nostalgia: Origins and Ends of an Unenlightened Disease* or to any of the more specialized scholarly case studies of the theories that followed in Hofer's wake, such as Michael Roth's exploration of "Medical Studies of Nostalgia in Nineteenth-Century France." Here my interests are twofold: first in observing the origin of nostalgia as a "problem"—literally a disease at this point—and second in locating that problem within the social field of early modern Europe.

Confronted with the above origin story, we might well wonder, why? What was so special about the late-seventeenth century? Why Swiss mercenaries and not others? It wasn't just medical researchers who associated the disease with the Swiss—the latter quickly found

[2] The facts of the story to follow are drawn primarily from Illbruck.

themselves saddled with a Europe-wide stereotype. As Illbruck has pointed out, there were decisive changes afoot in European military life that likely made all the difference. The central problem concerned the "rise of standing armies, a process vigorously promoted by absolutist monarchs," whereby "upon enlisting a foreign soldier was stripped of his very foreignness" and denied the opportunity to leave service after a successful campaign, as had previously been the norm (33, 34). In part, then, nostalgia pointed to a stumbling block in the path of the protagonist in one of the stories Foucault taught us to tell, of how the Enlightenment "invented the disciplines" (quoted in Illbruck 36). With surprising regularity, nostalgia became associated with noncompliant folk in the face of new social projects. According to John Funchion, the idea outlived its medical heyday in Europe by taking up roots in the United States. "Home, Sweet Home," for example, was banned on the front lines of the American Civil War for fear of soldiers' becoming afflicted (Funchion 2). But it was not just the soldiers—"slaves, women, students, immigrants, and Western settlers all emerged as groups especially vulnerable to this ailment" (12). The minority of the American sufferers provided a nice counterpoint to the earlier European puzzlement over the prevalence of the disease among those from the hinterlands: the Swiss, Norwegians, and Icelanders.

Entangled with the strictly diagnostic thread of nostalgia's history is a more philosophical strand as well. Philosophers, after all, wanted to make sense of the disease too, urgently even. Nostalgia threatened the health not only of its patients, but also, Illbruck stresses, of the Enlightenment itself; "enigmatic, particular, and local, the very disease was a challenge to the Enlightenment, and was seen as such" (52). Where doctors came up with altitude- and air-based theories of nostalgia's commitment to the incommensurability of place, philosophers like Immanuel Kant saw in it more universal problems, like category errors and immaturity. For

Kant, the Swiss only *think* that they miss their old villages and valleys. In reality, their "longing…is aroused by the recollection of a carefree life and neighborly *company* in their youth, a longing for the places where they enjoyed the very simple pleasures of life" (quoted in Illbruck 131, emphasis original). They wish, in short, not to face maturity and its burdensome blend of complexity and drudgery; so they imagine returning to a place where those burdens did not exist. Coming a bit later, Schopenhauer will crystallize a favorite interpretation of the enabling error that lets the nostalgic confuse place for childhood when he claims that, in nostalgia, "time deceives us by wearing the mask of space" (quoted in Illbruck 139). Both thinkers share the conviction that nostalgic desire is simultaneously confused about what it wants and unable ever to achieve the "real" object of longing, which is now metaphysicalized as an inevitable feature of human existence. Kant, for example, interprets the home-coming "cure" of Swiss mercenaries as disillusionment. Upon arrival, they realize that what they really wanted was not return but a fantasy that they can never actually have (again).

A third strand of nostalgia arises later than the previous two. More sentimental and psychologically normalized than its predecessors, it conforms better to our expectations of what nostalgia looks like today. Linda Austin has called it (and the period of its shaping) "nostalgia in transition," as per the title of her book on the subject. Between 1780 and 1917, she argues, nostalgia went underground, at least within fashionable European thought. More precisely, it dipped out of consciousness and slid into "the recreational nostalgic body," where it took the "form of automatic or habit remembering" (11, 198). Austin sometimes calls this a "transition from affliction to aesthetic," as nostalgics turned from their passive consumption by desire to various aesthetic means of "miming the long-awaited return home" (4, 11). As this last sentence may make clear, Austin takes the inability to return much more pragmatically than do Kant and

Schopenhauer. She stays with the soldier who cannot leave the battlefield but must find a way to go on living and working. The "materialist" and pragmatic bent of the new nostalgic practices offer, for Austin, a welcome escape from cognitive or spiritual accounts of experience, but she notes that, at the time, both scientific and artistic communities remained committed to the latter, which accounts for the increasing denigration of nostalgic aesthetics during the period (Austin 3). In particular, the new nostalgia looked inauthentic (because automatic and impersonal), hackneyed (because invested in repetition), and uncritical (because non-reflexive and explicitly therapeutic).

Nostalgia in transition did not, however, pull its aesthetics out of thin air. It appealed to a strand of nostalgia arguably older than the term itself—that is, the cluster of conventions whose development Aaron Santesso traces in what he calls the eighteenth-century English "nostalgia poem." Santesso is not interested in diagnoses, philosophies, or even the pragmatic practices of nostalgia. He cares about its "genre-based foundation" (38). These foundations, he suggests, lie in the productive tension between the new novelistic empiricism and an older poetics of idealization; "nostalgia poems are a kind of opposite to novels" (67). More concretely, the new genre fuses two tired genres, pastoral and elegy, in order to create something "knowingly, even pessimistically idealized" (71-72). Laurence Lerner has influentially claimed that pastoral itself has always had nostalgia as its "basic emotion" (41). Santesso, however, stresses a crucial difference between the premodern pastoral and its modern nostalgia descendants: while premodern pastoral "accepts that none of its readers live in the 'golden days,'" modern nostalgia poetry "depends on its audience feeling that they 'know' the characters and world that are now 'gone,' even as they recognize that they never did. Modern nostalgia exists only because the reader is willing to feel nostalgia" (139). The result is the curious mix of generic and particular

that we have come to expect of nostalgic aesthetics, where memories are "intended as personal…but almost never individuated" (Austin 61).

The final strand of nostalgia I want specifically to draw out for inspection is the commercial. What is sometimes called the "nostalgia industry" takes the sentimental practices that Austin outlines and commodifies them, producing a whole economy around the circulation of objects (such as souvenirs) that externalize memory and evade the pangs of nostalgic longing even as they tease us with the possibility of such pangs.[3] Susan Stewart is among the most famous critics of this strand, leading her to call nostalgia "a social disease" (23). By this point in nostalgia's history, however, the weight of the terms history is felt quite clearly as aspects of the earlier senses permeate accounts, as the reference to "disease" makes clear, as well as the metaphysical spin Stewart gives to her understanding of it.

These are the five major nostalgic threads on which this dissertation will draw: the diagnostic, the metaphysical, the sentimental/practical, the literary-generic, and the commercial. Each of the five threads comes with its own negative stereotypes. Viewed from a diagnostic angle, nostalgia is disruptive and unproductive; from the metaphysical perspective, it creates dogmatic fictions and desires the impossible; in a sentimental mode, it seems unthinking; when it draws on generic tropes, it looks clichéd; and when commercialized, it encourages consumerism.[4] These stereotypes are familiar; they are built into the very idea of nostalgia as it

[3] In a review of Austin's book, Kevis Goodman suggests that what Austin describes "resembles quite precisely classic accounts of ideology by Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, and others" (133). This assessment perhaps confuses the nostalgia industry (unified under the ideology of capitalism) with the more diffuse and ideologically mixed sentimental practices Austin outlines.

[4] If it appears that I have ignored one of nostalgia's most common denigrations—as reactionary—it is because on this schema, reactionary nostalgia looks much the same as the disruptive and unproductive nostalgia of early modern soldiers. Admittedly, those accused of being reactionary tend to be associated with the old elite whereas the soldiers belong to lower

circulates within our culture. That this should be so is a central fact of "nostalgia discourse," which is my name for a set of conventions that organize our culture's use and understanding of the word nostalgia, particularly within "critical" contexts such as scholarship, editorials, think pieces, etc. In speaking of nostalgia *discourse,* I intend to stress that these associations are backgrounded, that they undergird our everyday ways of speaking about nostalgia in such a way that it becomes unnecessary to make them explicit. Therefore I will not expend much particular energy citing specific writers who hold these attitudes about nostalgia, except where they are relevant to particular texts and issues under consideration. Instead, I appeal to a common sense of the appropriateness of an exchange such as the following: While discussing a new television show, someone complains that she "can't stand how nostalgic it is"; her friend, evidently a bigger fan of the show, responds, "Really? I thought it offered a pretty complex picture of the period." The appropriateness of the exchange—the fact that we take the friend's response as a relevant rebuttal—rests on a conventional set of connotations that extend well beyond the meaning of a word, revealing a cultural commonsense that shapes how we understand and debate certain emotional relationships to the past. These associations, moreover, attach in an outward reaching network away from the word nostalgia, so that we do not always need to mention it.

So: nostalgia is often an insult, and it's certainly "never a compliment" (Brennan 164). Noting why and how this is, a few scholars, such as Pakistani anthropologist Nauman Naqvi, have proposed that we abandon the term altogether. According to Naqvi, nostalgia provides no useful critical category at all, with its historical ties to a "masculinist, overbearing modernity" that sees nostalgics as "inadequately modern subjects" who will not relinquish their provincial

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social classes, but both sides are being addressed as nostalgic from the perspective of the new elite (or the elite's new modes of rule). In both cases, someone is standing in the way of what the new order wishes to call progress.

ties to home and countryside" (48). Obviously, my position differs or this project would never have gotten off the ground. Among the points in favor of continuing to talk about nostalgia is, first, that many people understand and champion their own experience explicitly in those terms. We will see one such example in Chapter 3, the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali, who went so far as to title one of his volumes, *A Nostalgist's Map of America.* One would hope for a more sympathetic reading of his work than a debunking of its keyword. A second reason to keep "nostalgia" on the table is that it has shaped cultural production even in its more misguided uses as an accusation against "inadequately modern subjects," as I will argue it does the work of A. K. Ramanujan, in Chapter 1. On an even broader scale, John J. Su has pointed out that self-consciousness about doing something that might be considered problematic has become a widespread feature of contemporary nostalgia novels (10-11). The final reason to hold onto our terminology is that "nostalgia," despite its often pejorative usage, points to a rich and theoretically fascinating set of experiences and actions. In particular, nostalgia (the experience named by the word) reveals our involvement in the world to us as problematic, but already laden with value terms. I will say more about this below, but first I want to clarify where this dissertation is left standing after disavowing pure pejoration. Is nostalgia then "good"?

I am sympathetic to nostalgia's defenders, but it is important to stress that I am not simply reversing the judgment set against it. I agree with Linda Austin's assessment that nostalgia and its products cover "no uniform ideological position" (4). Alastair Bonnett may even be right to oppose efforts at "reclaiming" nostalgia for progressive politics. Nostalgia for Bonnett is "a disruptive and unsettling force; something that has the power to question standard political labels and distinctions between 'progressive' and 'reactionary', radical and conservative, left and right. Acknowledging nostalgia pushes us into choppier and less

comfortable waters" (1). I likewise sympathize with John Su when he says, "My own sense is that even the most ideologically compromised forms of longing express in attenuated fashion a genuine human need" (3).

My holding these positions does not mean that I believe that nostalgia comes in good or bad kinds. This dissertation firmly rejects the possibility of naming the features of a regressive nostalgia over and against those of a more salutary longing. Typologies of nostalgia overwhelmingly favor a continuum model that remains obviously indebted to the earliest attempts to understand it. On this model, nostalgia is, before anything else, troublesome, reactionary, and foolish. The model presupposes that nostalgia at its most basic is primitive and that as the light of reason dawns on it, it is awoken into something gradually more acceptable. Fred Davis gave an influential early version of this when he divided nostalgia into three "orders" (in the sense of first-, second-, and third-order cognition): simple nostalgia, reflexive nostalgia, and interpreted nostalgia (17). The first entails the "unquestioned conviction that the past was better" (64), while the second begins to question that conviction (starts wondering what is true, how the past really was, etc.), and the third locates the birth of the conviction in nostalgia (starts wondering where the feeling of nostalgia comes from, focuses on the self rather than on the past or the present per se). The most famous formulation of the continuum theory, however, is dual, and we owe it to Svetlana Boym. Boym distinguishes between restorative and reflective nostalgias, which she assures us are just "tendencies" not "types." Restorative nostalgia seeks, as its name implies, to restore the past in all its glorious specificity. Reflective nostalgia, by contrast, acknowledges the passage of time and chooses, instead of restoration, wistful reveling in the awareness of loss.

The problem with these, indeed most, binary accounts of nostalgia (as well as with Davis'

tripartite expansion) is that they imagine some basic thing, "nostalgia," that then gets either fixed or ruined by adding another layer of something else. On one reading of Boym, the basic emotion tends toward reaction until reflexivity restores the possibility for ethics and justice. Ann C. Colley, a Victorianist, suggests that the yearning itself—a good thing—can productively "attach[]…to a wider orbit and multiple dimensions that continually qualify the experience of longing" (7). If, however, one acts concretely on it, fixes the object of longing in a here and now, it loses that productiveness. Although her view and Boym's look superficially different—one sees an essentially active longing rightly curtailed with reflection and the other sees an essentially reflective longing ruined by taking action—their division is quite similar. Nostalgia needs to be disengaged from action to be good. Illbruck has noted a similar point when he asks, regarding Boym's distinction, "does reflective nostalgia then not play a role similar to that of art in modern society, a mere pastime for those who are freed from labor?" I, too, am wary of "keeping nostalgia at a distance from reality and praxis" (22).

There is one scholar who has proposed a value-based distinction that has the benefit of keeping both halves of nostalgia within praxis: anthropologist Kathleen Stewart. "There may be a redemptive nostalgia," she says, "in a distinction between the (active) production of 'country crafts' and their (mere) consumption of their (passive) reproduction as empty styles" (234). She also paraphrases this as "acting *in*" versus "acting *on*" the world (235). Crucially, however, she notes that "it is certainly not the ideology itself that makes the difference but the social situations to which it attaches" (234). Herein lies the primary insight this dissertation takes up from anthropology, and it goes beyond the need to avoid too gross a typology of good and bad nostalgias.

Another anthropologist, William Cunningham Bissell, will help us specify it. He has

argued forcefully against monolithic depictions of nostalgia. "In both popular and academic contexts," Bissell says, "nostalgia is frequently portrayed as a reaction or response to more general forces—capitalist restructuring, for example, or the onslaught of modernity. As a result, it is often treated as a unified, consistent, and shared phenomenon—a sensibility suffusing an entire social field. Nostalgic discourses, however, are anything but singular" (216). Such reminders to attend to cases before generalities constitute a lesson this dissertation takes very seriously. Not only do we need to avoid making a monolith of nostalgia, we must realize that even individuals do not hold well-defined nostalgias locked in their hearts, taking them out to fondle every now and then. Although we can speak of countable nostalgias, we must be careful in doing so. Nostalgia is prompted by contexts (seeing a vacation photo on one's computer while at work; revisiting a childhood home; watching a nostalgia film; etc.) Accordingly, I take nostalgia to be situated and its values to be located in the moments of its activation (meaning that a nostalgic film can produce reactionary responses for some and revolutionary nostalgias for others).

This insight takes us surprisingly far from not only Boym but also most postcolonial accounts of nostalgia. Indeed, to the extent that we follow Susannah Radstone's division of nostalgia criticism into historicizing and universalizing, we are forced to leave all historicizing accounts behind, or at least to take them with a large grain of salt. Boym, a weak historicist, takes nostalgia and the "progress" of modernity to be "like Jekyll and Hyde: alter egos," construing nostalgia as a "defense mechanism" in the face of modernity's harsher movements (*xvi*, *xiv*). While indisputable as a general point, if given any specificity it violates our need to locate nostalgia only in the moment of its arising. The problem is that we don't know what, in any given moment, constitutes modernity (or postcoloniality) for nostalgia to be the alter ego *of*.

A corollary may make the point clearer. It is often said that what the nostalgic wants is a *nostos* or homecoming. It is also often said that the home so desired is a fiction (as per our inheritance of Kant). A witticism by John Funchion puts it nicely, "'There is no place like home' until the nostalgic participates in its creation" (3). We assume too quickly that we know what kind of home is created here, or for that matter, that we know what "creation" means. The nostalgic home is precisely something that has been thrown into question, though. The nostalgic finds, perhaps suddenly, or is at least reminded that she doesn't live there. And she may remember a time when she believes she did, but that does not mean that she knows what home *is*. Calling it "the moment that she remembers" does an injustice both to the memory (for which it refuses to specify any content) and to whatever occasioned her desire.

The object of desire is better captured by what Su calls "the haunting irony of nostalgia," meaning the sense that the present is haunted by all of the things that "might have been," as articulated around some past moment that points in that other direction (89). Su's account emphasizes nostalgia's sense of history's contingency, not the inevitability of progress. Crucially it also leaves open the multiplicity of resonances associated with the memory. Home means many things, all of which may haunt us. Alastair Bonnett claims that nostalgia "calls us back to meaning" (6), and I take him to mean that it raises the question of meaning. Like Su's haunting irony, the call back to meaning is a call to reevaluate the present and the course of history that led to it. Su actually shares a similar line of thought when he observes that nostalgia crystalizes around ethically "thick" concepts like "dignity" and "greatness," which are shown precisely to raise the possibility of debate and investigation, not as alibis to eschew those same—though nothing prevents anyone from refusing the "call" to meaning-making (135). In Chapter 3, I expand on these insights using a phenomenological approach, but for now, I want to return to the

state of the scholarly field.

Although I have already disagreed preemptively with many postcolonial takes on nostalgia, if we are going to take seriously the question of context, we must begin by getting the lay of the land with respect to nostalgia in the two largest scales of framing that concern us: the postcolonial and the South Asian. Postcolonial studies in general and those of South Asia in particular have had a recurrently intimate (if often implicit and tangential) relationship with nostalgia. Particularly in its transnationally oriented moments, postcolonialism has lavished attention upon such nostalgia-soaked keywords as "home," "exile," "belonging," "roots," "nativism," and its often anti-nostalgic opposite, "cosmopolitanism."[5] In general, however, nostalgia *per se* has not been much theorized, or rather has been used as a short-hand for much larger tacitly assumed theories. Perhaps most prominently, nostalgia has featured as the name for the structuring affect and impetus behind nationalism, as when Gayatri Gopinath observes, "The nation (as many critics have asserted) is a nostalgic construction, one that evokes an archaic past and authentic communal identity to assert and legitimize its project of modernization" (468). While undoubtedly there have been nostalgic appeals made on behalf of the nation, I neither want the nation reduced to nostalgia nor nostalgia reduced to the nation. Both take us too far from the contextualized nostalgia that interest me.

Some headway into theorizing nostalgia in postcolonial literary studies has been made recently by Dennis Walder, in his *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation, and Memory*, as well as in scattered articles on individual writers (references to which pepper this dissertation). We can be grateful to Walder for provincializing European nostalgia criticism. Like

[5] For an example of such work that includes an explicit discussion of "nostalgia" and its conceptual relevance to postcolonialism and cultural criticism broadly, see Timothy Brennan's *At Home in the World*, especially pages 164-165.

most work on nostalgia from a literary-critical perspective, however, (and indeed like most postcolonial work from that perspective) Walder's book remains overwhelmingly novel-centered. The form of criticism he develops attends to "the imaginative reconstruction of the past" within postcolonial novels (12). And he claims that "without the element of reflexivity, of self-analysis, the past becomes a distorting fiction" (164). When it comes to the poetry this dissertation considers, however, the past is not "reconstructed." And yet, I argue, it is nostalgic. Moreover, it is not always self-reflexive. This, too, is misleading when applied as a criterion to the poetry before us (or indeed any art). For, while Walder's claim is absolutely true of a person (across their life) or a culture, it is less certain that a particular poem needs to be an example of that self-analysis, merely that it needs to be taken up within a life that also encompasses reflexivity.

Within nostalgia criticism, a number of postcolonial scholars have outlined various types of nostalgia (beyond the good/bad binaries we have already problematized). Patricia Lorcin has differentiated between colonial and imperial nostalgias, where the former names the "embellishment of lived experience" by former colonizers (i.e., those who lived in the colonies) and the latter names "the loss of empire" and has more to do with power, rather than lifestyles (2, 9). Bissell has used the same terms to different ends, using "colonial nostalgia" to refer to the nostalgia of the colonized for colonialism, whereas imperial nostalgia belongs to the colonizers. In that respect, colonial nostalgia looks a lot like what Jacob Dlamini has called "native nostalgia," the nostalgia of a "black South African" who "remember[s] apartheid with fondness" (13). Dlamini's nostalgia is even more attenuated in its desire for return than Bissell's colonial nostalgia. In fact, it offers an important lesson for nostalgia criticism more broadly: sometimes nostalgia does not want return so much as an acknowledgment that there were lives worth living

then too, indeed worth mourning the loss of, even for a better world.

For the most part, this dissertation will not worry about kinds of nostalgia in this way, namely in terms of a shared idea of home or a shared reason for holding it close to heart. That work has generally already been done with great sensitivity. The one exception will be what I call "counter-nostalgias" in the second chapter, naming a shared nostalgia of the first postcolonial generation of Indian writers in English that opposes Orientalist and nationalist nostalgia with its own. But what is new in what I outline is the fact that it is not a life-world that is missed, so much as a style, or a linguistic possibility. These poets recognize in earlier eras other poets who got "back in touch" with the vernacular, forging an immediate language when all that seemed available was the hyper-mediated language of classical literature. This nostalgia for style is not something that scholars have paid much attention to.

The other type of nostalgia I will name, "translingual nostalgia," concerns a category of nostalgias, not a single shared nostalgia. As I use the term, translingual nostalgia refers to any nostalgia that imagines the past/present divide as coinciding (or significantly overlapping) with a divide between languages.

Before turning to the next section, I would be remiss not to mention one final frame for my interest in nostalgia. Insofar as nostalgia is a paradigmatic and habitual object of critique, my dissertation ends up inevitably resonating in certain ways with Rita Felski's call for post-critical modes of reading in, e.g., *The Limits of Critique*. Her argument's divisiveness makes me wary of committing myself completely to her argument, and indeed my own arguments stand on quite separate terms. However, given Felski's question, "Why are we so hyperarticulate about our adversaries and so excruciatingly tongue-tied about our loves?" (13), I cannot help but think my dissertation an attempt to give some articulateness to nostalgia's loves. It should be stressed that

the effort to move past critique is not, however, an attempt to reject it once and for all, just to provincialize it within a larger subset of analytical tools. Critique, on this view, is characterized by a certain skeptical mood that privileges the ability always to call into question even the terrain one is standing on. It is, in general, embarrassed of the need to be standing on any ground at all. Although critique would rephrase such embarrassment in the form of a claim (that there are no final grounds), it does not follow from that claim's truthfulness that the claim needs constantly to be made, nor that not making it entails its denial. Nostalgia is a particularly apt terrain to explore such modes as it is one of the most critically maligned affects out there. Moreover, as I argue in Chapter 1, the critical impulse has to a certain extent been built into a subset of nostalgic and anti-nostalgic poetry (in a genre I call the nostalgic shame poem). Since I want to offer modes of reading outside that critical impulse—modes that call it into question without "interrogating" it (i.e., without simply taking on a higher-order level of critique)—my methods are (as I understand the term) post-critical. I stress that post-critique as Felski proposes it is not apolitical or an attempt to bracket politics. It is an attempt to think politics along (analytically) positive lines, paying attention to attachments and affirmations as much as what is problematic or insufficient.

INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

This dissertation participates in and contributes to a number of currents in recent scholarship on English-language literature in India. The general thrust of these contributions can be characterized in terms of three primary impulses, signaled by the keywords of my title: translingual, nostalgia, and poetry. The pull of each term, naturally enough, brings my project in line with some scholarly trends and away from others. Poetry pulls me away from postcolonialism's prevailing interest in the novel genre, and in so doing aligns me with critical trends less invested in representation and mimesis. Nostalgia invites me to join in recent

reconsiderations of postcolonial aesthetics, drawing attention away from the field's often doggedly sociological concerns. Finally, the translingual locates the object of my research between or across languages, hence firmly embedded in specific multilingual contexts and at some distance from the transnational flows of certain canonical postcolonialisms. Ultimately, these various tributaries constitute—to elaborate the riverine metaphor—a kind of braided flow, each reinforcing the other and ultimately inseparable, even as specific moments can be attributed more to one than another. Since the last section has already specified the interest nostalgia holds for me, this section will focus more on the other two keywords in hopes of bringing due clarity to the overall project before us.

Let us begin with the dissertation's quite conscious drift away from the novel genre, which has consumed so much of recent literary-critical attention. The problems associated with such an overwhelming focus on one genre have not gone unnoticed.[6] A recent (2018) special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, for example, draws attention once again to the need to attend also to, as the editors put it, "'[m]inor' genres in postcolonial literatures." It goes without saying that the "minority" of these genres implies no value judgment; it simply "refers to the ways in which cultural products that fall outside the novel format are minoritized by postcolonial scholarship" (Munos and Ledent 3). Postcolonial poetry would be one notable example. Gratefully, that genre has received increasing critical attention over the last twenty

[6] Sometimes the novelistic biases of postcolonial literary criticism leads to odd but distorted moments of self-awareness, as when Rashmi Sadana considers how a pair of novels—Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* and Anita Desai's *In Custody*—nostalgically lament the communal loss of Urdu poetry (34-45). Sadana argues that these novels participate in a familiar metaphorical equation of English with the novel and Urdu with poetry, where the former absorbs the latter even as it mourns its doing so. What she ignores entirely, however, is the quite separate existence of Anglophone poetry and its much less melancholic (but still nostalgic) dialogue with the Urdu canon, some of which we will see discussed in Chapter 3.

years, a trend to which this project contributes.

At the forefront of that growing body of work is Jahan Ramazani's pathbreaking *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (2001), which first set the stakes for the field. A number of articles and monographs have followed in its wake, expanding and nuancing our picture of the terrain mapped out by Ramazani. Notable examples in dialogue with this dissertation include Rajeev Patke's *Postcolonial Poetry in English* (2006), and Ashok Bery's *Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry* (2007). More recently, however, scholarship on the poetry discussed in these books has shifted its attention somewhat, following disciplinary trends, away from the "postcolonial" and toward categories like the "transnational" (Ramazani's 2009 *A Transnational Poetics*) and the "global" (Omaar Hena's 2015 *Global Anglophone Poetry: Literary Form and Social Critique in Walcott, Muldoon, de Kok, and Nagra*). While these works continue to produce fresh insights, I believe that there is cause to regret the field's decreasing dialogue with the local and the vernacular, a point to which I will return below. By zooming in on a more precise moment—one generation (born between roughly 1920 and 1950)—in a single national context, I hope to expand and ground the thematic concerns of earlier scholars, restoring at the same time some of the multilingual complexity into which this poetry is born.

One of the first questions to arise in the study of postcolonial poetry asks simply, why have scholars so often ignored it? As Ramazani notes, part of the reason for the genre's relative neglect is that "postcolonial criticism is largely grounded in mimetic presuppositions about literature," and poetry is "harder [than fiction or drama] to annex as textual synecdoche for the social world of Nigeria, Trinidad or India" (*Hybrid* 4). My own deep skepticism of those "mimetic presuppositions" will take me even further at times than Ramazani, who still tends to

talk of an "experience"—whether "split cultural" or a "postcolonial"—being variously "mediated," "registered," and "express[ed]" (2, 75). Particularly toward the end of Chapter 3, I will push for a more sensuous and affective account of poetic form as a way of shedding the theoretical blinders brought on by too-constant focus on issues of mimesis and representation.

I gain some encouragement in doing so from the work of Ananya Jahanara Kabir, whose desire for "moving beyond narrative" also brings her to questions of nostalgia and affect (*Partition's Post-Amnesia's* 15). Kabir insists that increased attention to the "lyric impulse" over and against the "narrative impulse" helps keep at bay the latter's tendency toward "linear causality" and the relegation of political "conflicts to the category of faits accompli [sic]" (19, 17). For Kabir, the two impulses form a spectrum, and any given work shuttles and bumps among various points along that spectrum. It is not that novels and films are deadening where poetry and painting are emancipatory; to the contrary, one of the reasons for attending to the lyric impulse where it is most obvious (in the musical interludes of Indian popular cinema, painting, lyrics, etc.) allows us eventually to return and see the workings of explicitly narrative texts more clearly. In particular, we are able to "recuperate the vernacular vocabulary of longing," which tends to crouch in moments of lyric intensity, not within the ordered logic of narrative (23). This dissertation therefore remains particularly attentive to moments where what I call nostalgia is really (also) a shade, say, of *viraha* or *yād*, placed into the larger circuits of nation, globe, and history.

The careful attention to aesthetics and aesthetic history implied by the foregoing brings me also into dialogue with scholars trying to rethink the place of aesthetics in postcolonialism broadly. Like critics such as Deepika Bahri, I care about the "lack of a sufficiently developed critical framework for addressing 'the aesthetic dimension'…of postcolonial literature" with

clear reference to society and politics (1). While what follows is not an attempt to theorize such a dimension explicitly—and I suspect no such singular dimension exists—I hope to provide a kind of poetic pushback against Bahri's exclusive and exclusionary focus on the novel and its "cognitive and rational content," which she finds delivered through "mimesis and representation" (17). In particular, by attending to the ways in which nostalgia already implicates value (by calling the present into question and bringing some affective claim of the past to bear on it), I hope to illuminate the potential of artworks to ignite or fuel certain modes of political desire.

While I will not engage their work substantially, I nonetheless recognize this dissertation as sharing with recent scholars the larger enterprise of breaking our field free of the exclusive grip of modernist and postmodernist aesthetics, "celebrating the magical, the parodic, and other forms of 'post-realisms'" (Anjaria 4). The reconsideration of "realism in the colony" by Ulka Anjaria, for example, relies on the dual observation that, (1) when it comes to supposedly outmoded forms and aesthetics (such as realism), postcolonial critical common sense often relies on stereotypes rather than developing its own models adequate to specific contexts, and (2) often those stereotypes belong more appropriately—to the extent they belong anywhere but the trash heap—to the European contexts where they emerged, not to the (post)colonial contexts where they arrive as familiar accusations of belatedness. Jahan Ramazani's work has similarly problematized any attempt to project American anxieties about a stereotyped "lyric 'I'" on postcolonial poetry (3).

The move away from the stereotypically "postcolonial" novel—with its modernist-derived aesthetics, nation-state-centered thematics, and relatively large global market—brings us quickly into a variety of landscapes one might call "vernacular," following S. Shankar's characterization of that term as "oriented away from the transnational, the modern, and the

hybrid and toward the local, the traditional, and the culturally autonomous" (xv). Postcolonial poetry interestingly bridges the two terms, rooted as that poetry often is in intimate local coteries that nonetheless affiliate transnationally (Nerlekar *Bombay Modern*). One of the more remarkable and exciting aspects of Indian poetry in English is how much less anxious it can be about the idea of tradition than its novel cousin. That is not to say that it has no such anxiety; it shares that much with any modernism. Nonetheless, Indian poets in English traffic much more easily with the past, via translation, and with the vernacular co-present through multilingual writing than do most Indian novelists in English. All of the poets considered in this dissertation are at least translators if not actively productive in multiple languages. This is so even when the poets are the "usual" transnational elite situated in American academies (such as A. K. Ramanujan or Agha Shahid Ali). Poetry, with its embrace of artifice and greater sense of place and tradition (not to mention its readers' willingness to tolerate extremes of estrangement and even incomprehension), encourages a breakdown of Shankar's vernacular/transnational divide by allowing the insularity of the former to travel with relative ease across the globe.

That said, the idea of vernacularity has remained an important touchstone for this project. One way it has done so is by removing the burden of thinking in terms of postcolonial literature as exclusively or even especially a form of "writing back."[7] More particularly, vernacularity has allowed me to place my work alongside that of Rashmi Sadana's efforts to clarify in terms of literary culture what it means for English to be an "Indian language" (*xv*). By that I do not mean the (also useful but now familiar) consideration of how English has been linguistically indigenized into various forms of Indian English, Hinglish, etc. Rather, Sadana draws attention to ways in which "English is no longer a postcolonial language," having become instead a local

[7] For the term, now in wide use, see Ashcroft et al.

"mediator" between various languages in India, for example (23).[8] Much has been said (by Sadana and others) about the Indian National Academy of Letters, the *Sahitya Akademi*, and its use of English as well as Hindi as a translational link language in its efforts to make the various literatures of India available to each other *as* "Indian" literature. This dissertation will accordingly spend less time positioning English within such institutional environments, which other scholars have already done, than on shedding light on the aesthetic development of English as a language with Indian cultural memory affectively and stylistically embedded into it.[9]

We thus arrive at a useful point for reflecting on such keywords as multilingualism, translingualism, and translation. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, whose work will be discussed in Chapter 2, has repeatedly insisted on the need for better ways of discussing the "multilingual sensibilities" of Indian poets in English (*Partial Recall* 164). He has especially shooed us away from the easy nativist gesture of "*Angrezihatao*" ("drive out English") or from explaining aesthetic success in English according to a straightforward if mysterious "geological model," wherein "each time [the poet] chooses to write he descends, caged canary bird in hand, into the thickly-seamed coal pit of the mother tongue" to retrieve and "make available" in English some nugget of the "tradition" (164). The model of translingual nostalgia attempts to make some progress in articulating at least the affective horizons of the "multilingual sensibilities" of Mehrotra's own generation.

Postcolonial interest in translation (and translation studies) has often focused either (1) on

[8] In the context of Indian poetry in English, Nerlekar has made a similar point about the achievements of *Poetry India* and the little magazines of 1960's Bombay, with their "systematic representation of Indian poetry in English as part of the larger landscape of Indian literatures," jostling alongside those other literatures, exchanging translations on the level of (in-text) parity (*Bombay Modern* 69).

[9] For examples of scholarship on the institutional life of English in India, besides that of Sadana, see George or Padma.

attempts by the colonizer to organize and "know" the non-West, linguistically and textually, in ultimate (if sometimes accidental) service of domination, or (2) on very nearly analogous grounds, seeing the postcolonial writer as someone who is translating her culture for Western consumption (or to disrupt the Western knowledge of her).[10] In the case of Indian translingual nostalgia and *its* translations, however, the intercultural aspect of translation is diminished if not eliminated entirely on occasion, if we take "intercultural" to signal a scenario where one group of people try to understand another. This is so for two reasons: first, these translations are generally across time rather than space (hence the nostalgia); and second, the consumers of the translations often enough, like the translator, share access to both languages—the creation of a new version and the recognition of its relationship to the original is where the pleasure lies, not in "knowing" something new. The new nostalgic translation into English thus parallels (albeit distantly) an earlier era when Sanskrit works were translated into vernaculars, where readers and translators alike shared familiarity with both versions and had little compunction about altering the original to fit new aesthetic and social contexts (although it bears repeating that the terms "original" and even "translation" are only used anachronistically and imprecisely to refer to these movements).

This dissertation's investment in intra-cultural translation thus also puts it into conversation with Christi Merrill's desire to develop ways of thinking about "texts authored in the plural," her phrase for the kind of text prevalent in South Asia that exists in many retellings and (what for Merrill is the same thing) translations. Such texts only seem to diminish in translation if we consider them as "authored" by particular individuals. Her desire, which I share,

[10] Examples of the former might include Eric Cheyfitz's *The Poetics of Imperialism Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan* or André Lefevere's "Composing the Other." Examples of the latter would include Marla Tymoczko's "Post-Colonial Writing and Literary Translation."

moves away from "a melancholic attachment to a lost speaking subject" (i.e., an "original" author) and turns instead to a kind of performativity, which she calls a "shamanistic performance, recitation" (30). By moving away from representational accounts of translation to "recitative" or otherwise active accounts, we can see translingual nostalgia not as a failed attempt at capturing some previous plenitude of meaning, but rather as a variously successful exercises that participate in the construction of a present.

MODERN SANSKRIT LITERATURE

The other literature of interest to this dissertation besides Indian Poetry in English is that of Modern Sanskrit. Readers may be surprised to learn that there is such a thing, that Sanskrit is not (exactly) dead. The question of Sanskrit's liveliness is a complicated one, so I want to use this section to offer a bit of history and to situate Modern Sanskrit within literary studies more broadly. Before beginning, however, I want to stress how understudied Modern Sanskrit is.[11] My ambitions in this dissertation, which only contains sustained discussion of a single poet, will therefore have to be modest. I am interested precisely and only in how Modern Sanskrit exemplifies self-consciousness about language life and death in terms that are resonant with my understanding of nostalgia more generally.

In the section to follow, I will track how Modern Sanskrit's arrival on the world stage

[11] Jürgen Hanneder has offered a discussion of two examples of Sanskrit prose (one late-nineteenth century, the other early twentieth) under the resonant title "Modernes Sanskrit. Eine vergessene Literatur" ("Modern Sanskrit: A Forgotten Literature"). In addition to its two case studies, Hanneder's article contains a few stray observations about Modern Sanskrit writ large, noting, for example, that "the *mahākāvya* tradition of Kālidāsa and Aśvaghoṣa, from its beginnings til today is to a certain extent unbroken," evidence for which he finds in Śāradāmaṇilīlācaritam, a mahākāvya on the wife of the Bengali saint Rāmakriṣna (211, translation mine). In general, however, my dissertation's interest in poetry and nostalgia at a later, explicitly postcolonial period in literary history makes Hanneder's article, though interesting, not specifically relevant.

(and the world stage's arrival in Sanskrit) inevitably pushes it out of the familiar spotlights that contemporary literary study favors for illuminating its objects. To anticipate the arguments to follow, I suggest that what is at stake is more than the (very real) fact that Modern Sanskrit inevitably falls between the disciplinary cracks when, on the one hand, it fails to appeal to the largely philological and historical interests of traditional Indology (the usual readers of Sanskrit), and on the other, it lends itself to neither the "writing-back" nor the subaltern-studies approaches so often favored by postcolonial critics (the usual readers of contemporary Indian literature). Instead, following Aamir Mufti, I suggest that the entire Orientalism-derived project of "world literature" is brought to bear in the production of Sanskrit as a dead language. In order to understand what is happening when Modern Sanskrit literature responds to that status—plays with it in its own literary undoing—we must therefore trace the complex history of how Sanskrit came to be thought dead. In so doing, we will discover that to intentionally write in a dead language in a mood of nostalgia for that language can be a potentially subversive act; much more, in other words, than the simply repetitive conservatism it might seem.

The story of how colonial discourse gave Sanskrit its death sentence comes in two parts: first, Sanskrit was pinned down, and then its life was called into question. As it turned out, questioning was all it took—the pinning had already knocked what life Sanskrit might have had out of it. As I hope to show, however, there remains even then, at story's end, an entity otherwise than living, otherwise than dead, carrying on in inscrutable (to Orientalist eyes) anachronism. I call that entity Modern Sanskrit. In order to approach it, though, we must flesh out the above narrative with a bit more detail.

First, the pinning down. As is well known by now, "The vast social world that was India

had to be classified, categorized, and bounded before it could be ordered" by the British (Cohn 21-22). One major strategy for carrying out that project involved positing "India" as such as an organizing category for scholarly investigation. "India," though, was not simply a contemporary geographic object, it was a "civilization." Attempts to make sense of that civilization led, as various scholars have shown, to a search for textual roots in "its" earliest Sanskrit writings.[12] Prevailing opinion at the time held that "the present condition of a society or civilization [could] be understood only as the outcome of its past," and nowhere better than at the "master moment" when the civilization was born (Dharwadker 175). But there were also less loftily academic motivations for utilizing the textual-civilizational methodology. First, there were political factors that encouraged Hindu- (and hence Sanskrit-) centrism in delimiting the civilization at hand. Second, there was a great deal of confusion over the messiness of the present, messiness which was readily escaped by turning to the past. The interplay of these motivations led scholars in the end to pin down a reasonably coherent field of Sanskrit literature and culture, which was taken to be uniquely expressive of the Hindu-Indian civilizational essence.

To give some texture to these observations (and to point to some evidence for them), let us consider the now-notorious case of the colonial construction of "Hindu law."[13] In 1772, Governor Warren Hastings issued a new Judicial Plan in Bengal. That plan, which provided that the peoples of India should be subject to their "own" laws, was largely responsible for

[12] See, e.g., Cohn; Dharwadker; Dodson; Mufti; and Rocher.

[13] The history recounted here is elaborated in more detail by, e.g., Cohn, Dodson, and Rocher, on whom the following account draws. I choose the perspective of administration and the law because it is in that domain that Sanskrit manifestly continues as a vital medium of production *within* colonial culture even as it is relegated imaginatively to the past. Hence the erasure of linguistic "life" is clearest. The basic narrative holds true in the other domains of culture—Rosane Rocher notes the "strikingly similar assumptions" that underpin efforts to understand Hinduism despite the lack of explicit administrative motivation (225).

establishing British interest in Sanskrit. In practice, the plan meant two bodies of law, one for Muslims and one for everyone else, understood as Hindus. The dichotomy was quite inapt, but it allowed the British to "cast themselves as the protectors of a vast and suppliant majority that had been held under the thumb of Muslim oppressors" in the wake of Mughal rule (Rocher 222). Immediately, however, problems arose. Not least was the question as to what "Hindu law" was. Hastings' idea was that there was an "ancient constitution" that had been passed down "unchanged from remotest antiquity," held in trust by Sanskrit-speaking Brahmin scholars, i.e., "pandits" (cited in Cohn 66).[14] They, however, confounded expectations by seeming, to suspicious British eyes, variously incompetent, dishonest, and inconsistent. Goaded by such frustrations, one prominent judge at the Supreme Court, William Jones, decided to learn Sanskrit himself to "check on" their work (cited in Cohn 28).

It hardly needs saying, therefore, that British scholars of the late 18th century, like Jones, did not come to Sanskrit wanting to become pandits. They came wanting rather to produce state-of-the-art *British* scholarship about what they believed the pandits to know. What pandits knew, however, was not necessarily what the colonial imagination wished it to be. If the British plan was to cut out the supposed middle men and read the laws themselves, the plan had flaws. To begin, the laws were complex and nowhere so succinctly stated as the phrase "ancient constitution" might suggest. The British required rigorous local instruction if they were to understand the texts. But, from what we can tell now, Bengal at the time was no hotbed of legal studies; the best Sanskrit minds were occupied with logic. Pandits did try to work with the British, though, which led to a "renaissance of *dharmaśāstra*," the branch of Sanskrit learning that colonial officials and their pandit interlocutors decided corresponded most closely to the

[14] For an introduction to the pandit as a cultural phenomenon, see Michaels.

English field of "law" (Rocher 237). The correspondence worked better in theory than practice, however. As was soon apparent, what a Bengali pandit did with *dharmaśāstra* very inadequately matched what a British judge did with his law books (hence Jones' initial frustration). The British believed, "in western fashion, that for a single problem there was only one single solution that could be right" (Rocher 237). Such conviction required further entrenching claims to the existence of a single legal code—India's "ancient constitution"—rather than confronting the messy reality, that labyrinth of commentarial traditions used by the pandits. The entire field of Sanskrit legal studies, therefore, had to be carefully constructed, albeit under the guise of deciphering and "re"-constructing lost origins.

Similar reconstructions went on in other domains, including religion, aesthetics, and—most crucially for us—literature. Each shared the basic presuppositions of the legal case, namely the whole civilizational logic of what Aamir Mufti has called the "Sanskrit-centered Indic complex" (116). In each domain, a particular text gained preeminence through translation and Indological study: the *Law of Manu* for legal studies, the *Bhagavad Gita* for Hindu religion, or Kalidasa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* for classical Sanskrit literature. Each text had, of course, been valued by the tradition; but only at this point does Sanskrit become, in the literary sphere, "the language of Kalidasa." For that matter, only here does *the* Indian tradition come into being.[15]

Already we can see two dimensions of what I am calling the "pinning down" of Sanskrit tradition. First, scholars posit a traditional unity. Second, that unity is located in the past—a past

[15] Sheldon Pollock rightly notes that there were parallel forms of "hierarchizing textualization" in precolonial South Asia ("Deep Orientalism?" 100). Where the colonial version differed, however, from its precolonial parentage (to which it directly appealed and of which it availed itself in its own project) is in linking the textuality to a given culture. Previously the texts provided truth *simpliciter*, not the truth *of the Hindus,* say, or *of India*. That is, we are now dealing with the foundations of a "national" culture.

which, in practice, exists only textually. We might speak, in a figurative mood, of Sanskrit being given a center of gravity that pulls attention toward its well-specified location in the past, toward, for example, the flourishing of Kalidasa at the Gupta court in the fifth century CE. But what is the attention drawn away *from*? Besides the obvious vernaculars, more recent Sanskrit writing also recedes from view. Note that texts produced in the intervening years between, say, the sought-after constitutional Ur-text and the present are, in this Indological framework, made both redundant (as only an elaboration of that first impetus) and quite likely decadent. In short, they become pointless to study.[16] As Rosane Rocher notes, the denigration of the later tradition was likely exacerbated by the tradition's own tendency to present itself as "derivative and commentarial" (229).

Consequently, the pandits "ceased to be considered the living guardians and interpreters of the indigenous tradition and were downgraded to assistants to, and employees of, the British" (Rocher 239). But this is only true of the "tradition" as newly constituted by the British. Other, more minor (in the sense of small, local) lineages continued along more or less customary lines. Michael Dodson stresses that even colonially employed pandits often continued to teach according to "traditional" methods at their homes. Colonial needs, moreover, were various. In order to undermine former channels of patronage (and hence the authority of former patrons), the administration also offered purely customary patronage to Sanskrit culture otherwise unaffiliated with administrative projects (Dodson 49). So, as a medium of communication, of instruction, indeed of textual production, Sanskrit the *language* continued popping up all over the place even

[16] A striking symptom of this mentality: only recently have scholars begun seriously to map out "Sanskrit knowledge systems on the eve of colonialism," (Pollock "Introduction"). That means, of course, that for most of the history of Indology, the most obvious gap in its understanding of Sanskrit culture lay precisely where Indology actually met its object of study.

as Sanskrit the *culture* came to be pinned in an image of stagnation. Even the colonial administration continued to use the living half of the language. Warren Hastings collected petitions written in Sanskrit "to be filed against his impeachment" (Raghavan, *Modern Sanskrit Writings* 3). And, most obviously, the court continued to hire pandits to write judicial opinions (in Sanskrit). Nevertheless, the axiology of Indology could only dismiss such uses of the language as inexpressive of anything "Sanskritic" or even Indian, as they are clearly products of the colonial relationship. What is a classical Indologist to do with any of the many Sanskrit odes to British monarchs?

Thus Sanskrit was pinned down as a cultural field and as an object of historical knowledge. Colonial projects to standardize subsequent education ensured that this fixed image of Indologized Sanskrit was given back to the language for self-replication. Because the government wished its pandits to write legal opinions uniformly, according to the British notion of India's ancient constitution, schools were established to teach and perpetuate the British-mediated Sanskrit tradition. Henceforth Sanskrit literature comes increasingly to mean, metonymically, Kalidasa, not the work, say, of a nineteenth-century Nepali pandit.[17] It is thanks to that legacy that an otherwise marvelous book called *The Modernity of Sanskrit* can refer not to any modern texts in Sanskrit, only to the role classical texts play in modernity (Sawhney).

Now that we have a working grasp on the first half of Sanskrit's colonial death sentence, we can turn to the second half, which comes not in the textual but in the social domain. Leaving the manuscripts behind, what did colonial-era thinkers make of Sanskrit's relative placement as one language among others? Initially, there was much confusion on the point. Many held that Sanskrit was artificial, invented by "insidious Bruhmans [sic]" to keep their secrets (Cohn 25,

[17] See Schneider.

37). William Jones disagreed, but thought it no older than "pure Hindi," which he considered the truly "primeval" language of northern India, Sanskrit having arrived through the supposed Aryan invasion (Dodson 127). Another observer noted that the pandits themselves "assert that [Sanskrit]…was never used as a common medium of communication among men," favoring instead a divine interpretation of the language (cited in Dodson 125). Each alternative had its own conceptual consequences, but the question was largely an academic one when pursued among Sanskritists.

In a variety of venues, however, the socio-historical placement of a language came to matter a great deal. That is because the British operated on what Robert Young calls a "nominalist monolingual model" of language (1209). Under that model, languages are discrete and nameable (hence the nominalism) and each speaker has a unique relationship with only one language, her so-called "mother tongue" (hence the monolingualism). Unfortunately, the model fundamentally failed to capture precolonial South Asia's linguistic complexity. As Lisa Mitchell notes,

> At the very beginning of the nineteenth century someone in southern India might find it perfectly natural to compose an official letter in Persian, record a land transaction in Marathi, send a personal note to a relative in Telugu, perform religious ablutions in Sanskrit, and barter with the vegetable vendor in Tamil, all in the course of a single day. (159)

And, she goes on to argue, none of those languages would have been the source of feelings of communal identity. Nevertheless, the nominalist monolingual model prevailed. Likely fueled by the rise of utilitarianism in nineteenth-century imperialist discourse as it clashed with the classicism of Sanskrit-centered Indology, the model came to a special prominence in political

decision-making, leading to claims about language and community taking center stage in competition for resources and authority.[18]

In terms of Sanskrit, this all means that it was immediately declared dead. Not just in the publications of the British, as it had been before, but by Indians themselves. Sheldon Pollock tells of the first known example, from 1857, the year of the "Mutiny" that marked both the decisive arrival of the British state apparatus and the first great image of indigenous resistance to it ("Death" 394). The Indian in question, a Gujarati poet by the name of Dalpatram, invokes the idea that Sanskrit had been dead already for a millennium (!) in an elegy in remembrance of Alexander Kinloch Forbes. Aside from being Dalpatram's friend, Forbes was a colonial administrator who founded the Gujarat Vernacular Society in order to encourage Gujaratis to "develop" their supposed mother tongue (Isaka 7). It is no coincidence that the arrival of Sanskrit's funeral coincides with the consolidation of a British-sponsored turn to the vernacular, nor that the poet declaring the death should become the acknowledged founder of "modern" Gujarati literature.[19] As we are coming to see, modernity in South Asian languages comes at the cost of Sanskrit's vitality (as perceived from "outside"—i.e., as seen from the mediating "neutrality" of English[20]—not as practiced internally).

Sanskrit's death knell then echoed across the subcontinent. In South India, people used it to leverage the value of the still-living Tamil, India's other "classical" language (Ramaswamy 44). In colonial Bengal, Ram Mohan Roy stepped into the Anglicism-Orientalism debate, deploying strategically rhetoric both sides could agree on: the Indological stereotype of Sanskrit education as "what was known two thousand years ago, with the addition of vain and empty

[18] For an account of the rise of utilitarianism and its impact on Orientalism, see Majeed.
[19] See also Kothari.
[20] On "English as vanishing mediator," see Mufti (16).

subtleties since produced by speculative men" (43)—never mind that this was not a characterization that he quite believed on its own terms; it spoke to his audience and served his ends, i.e., getting his countrymen access to the language and knowledge of the then-current power (Robertson). Nor were vernacular proponents in North India any more sympathetic to Sanskrit's claims to vitality, as new vernacular legitimacy lay precisely on monolingualist grounds. As one twentieth-century Hindi critic put it, "Even if English had not arrived to interrupt and break our tradition, we would still be forced to abandon Sanskrit today, because it is no longer the language of the common person" (Dvivedi, cited in Sawhney "Who" 299).[21] Leaving aside the question whether any standardized language in India at the time belonged to the "common man," notice the assumption that "we" can only have *one* language, and so must turn to the vernacular. Gone is the possibility of Sanskrit maintaining a separate literary sphere of practice.

The decisive moment in adopting the monolingual model comes when speakers rethink their relationship to language. That is one of the key insights of an important book by Lisa Mitchell on South India's embrace of mother-tongue monolingualism. Whereas previously people in South Asia—and, for that matter, pre-eighteenth-century Europe (Yildiz)—approached languages as "tools for particular tasks," now languages took on personal meaning, as attributes of identity (Mitchell 10). Accordingly, people had to take care of "their" language, keep it alive, and make it whole and healthy. Otherwise, they, as a community, would cease to exist (Mitchell 89-90). Sanskrit, however, had no such community identity, except perhaps on caste grounds—grounds which, needless to say, quickly lost their own legitimacy (with good reason).

[21] I am not saying that these political claims are illegitimate, only noting that their cumulative effect is to reinforce the notion of contemporary Sanskrit anachronism.

It would be a step too far, however, to say that Sanskrit was uniformly disavowed. It was widely esteemed, albeit in the form of the "heritage" whose production we saw above, by the emerging bourgeois classes who became in time the leaders of anti-colonial nationalism, as well as by ideologues of linguistic purity.[22] The latter gave Sanskrit a modicum of continued productive vitality, placing it rhetorically at the head of languages like Hindi, as their great legitimator and lexical storehouse. Sanskrit thus lived on, but only as the teleological endpoint of a "Sanskritized" Hindi or Bengali, a register that is popularly held abstruse, out of touch, and parochial—hardly the associations a living language would wish to have.

The problem with these many circulating deaths is that Sanskrit never really "lived" to "die." It just didn't fit the monolingual model's biologism. Indologists have long realized this.[23] As Sheldon Pollock notes, one could say that Sanskrit was "born dead" ("Death" 393). Increasing uneasiness with pat biologism has given way lately to a profusion of colorful, if not particularly helpful, metaphors. Sanskrit has been called, at one point or another, a "ghost" (Vajpeyi "Return" 46), a "vampire" (Sawhney "Who" 298), and a "zombie" (Knutson 120). It has even been likened to H. P. Lovecraft's Chthulhu (Knutson 16). Such extravagant metaphors, while not unfounded, ultimately manage to hold onto Sanskrit as freak exception, instead of using it to problematize the language model that so manifestly fails to do its object justice. Let us, then, emphasize the artificiality of Sanskrit's not simply dying, but becoming, of a sudden, a long-dead ancestor.

It would be equally artificial to insist, defensively, anachronistically, that Sanskrit was always living and continues to be so today—in short, that Sanskrit simply prompts us to clarify

[22] For examinations of the relationship between Hindi, nationalism, Sanskrit, and Hinduism, see Dalmia (on the 19th century); Orsini (on the early 20th); and Rai.
[23] Rapson had already made the point by 1904.

what we mean by language life. The relationship between Sanskrit and its environs has shifted frequently over the course of its history. Sanskrit *itself* is plural. One scholar's partial list of its forms includes: "*Vaidika*, ... 'Classical' Sanskrit with [its] many styles … Pāṇini's *'Bhāṣā*', Epic Sanskrit, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, Ārṣa Sanskrit (the language of the *ṛṣi*s), *Aiśa* Sanskrit (the language of *Īśa* or God), Buddhist Tantric Sanskrit … colloquial Sanskrit, *Ardhasaṃskṛta,* 'Quasi-Sanskrit', etc." (Vasudeva 186). Each lived in a different way, if lived is the word one insists upon. One of the more interesting questions in a literary history of Sanskrit is precisely what kind of life a given period found in the language, i.e., what distinctive uses Sanskrit's writers felt it to have at that time. That varies from the "language-intrinsic evocativeness" of the multilingual dramas of Kalidasa (Vasudeva 204) to the increasing "depth" of reference brought to the table as cosmopolitan and local intermingle in the vernacular millennium (Bronner and Shulman 2).

To recap: Sanskrit's death sentence operated on two levels. First, as Indology definitively arrived on the Indian scene, its institutional and methodological investments split Sanskrit into an "essential" body of texts, on the one hand, and an insignificant but diverse set of continued language practices, on the other. Later popular, scholarly, and political discourse rendered even the latter practices apparently anachronistic, superfluous to what was going on more "naturally" in the "mother tongues."

Readers familiar with Aamir Mufti's recent *Forget English!* may recognize in the above story a shifted perspective on what Mufti calls the "institution of 'Indian literature,' that is, the single event of its emergence and insertion into the space of world literature" (Mufti 38). That, too, is a two-part process, involving "the Sanskritization of tradition, on the one hand, and the invention of the modern vernaculars, on the other" (116-117). Mufti's account, though, focuses

on the successful, emergent end of the story—the body of writing newly reconstituted as India's contribution to world literature. His goal is to denaturalize, exposing the new world literature's genealogical roots in the Orientalist project. I am interested instead in what got left behind. Modern Sanskrit, I contend, is such a remainder. But what exactly remained?

Unfortunately, as Jürgen Hanneder notes, "This [i.e., colonial] phase in the production of Sanskrit works remains until today one of the blank spots in Indology" (299).[24] At the level of crude generalization, though, we can follow V. Raghavan in observing that Sanskrit's modernity began with a bifurcation. Some pandits continued along the traditional path, while others interacted more interestedly with the colonial government and its new institutions ("Sanskrit Writings"). They—the latter collaborators—gave birth to a complex series of renegotiations, borrowings, and innovations that can only be accounted for under a new historical heading: call it "modern." Thus began a slow and uneven slide from writing which was "merely" left behind by the worldly gaze to the literature constituted *in* being left behind.

Allow me to clarify. If Sanskrit's entry onto the world stage via projects like Jones' translations of Kalidasa came at the cost of specifically *Modern* Sanskrit's ability also to stand on that stage, it does not mean that Modern Sanskrit writers simply ignored the on-going pageantry. As time went on, new literature in Sanskrit began increasingly to register symptomatically its newfound status as imperiled (and eventually dead) inheritor of the tradition *as seen by* the world at large. Symptoms therefore register both aspects of the "death sentence" outlined earlier. First, we find the language absorbing a self-image inflected by Indological discourse. Thus the European infatuation with Kalidasa, and his *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* in

[24] There have been a number of historical sketches from inside the tradition. Most are largely bibliographic in nature, peppered with casual evaluation. Seminal such accounts can be found in Raghavan's article "Sanskrit," as well as his book-length *Modern Sanskrit Writings*.

particular, returns to Modern Sanskrit as a matter of its very definition. Modern Sanskrit becomes "the language of Kalidasa," and, as if to prove the point, an unprecedented flurry of texts appeared explicitly engaging the poet's legacy. Satya Vrat Shastri has provided scholars a boon in this regard, offering some of Modern Sanskrit literatures's finer criticism in two volumes: one on sixteen literary works recounting Kalidasa's life story and another on forty works *otherwise* related to his poetry. Works considered span the twentieth century, and even then the list is non-exhaustive.

The second way that Modern Sanskrit took on the burden of its new status comes in an immense self-consciousness about language choice. Now appears a new genre of meta-poetry, which takes the Sanskrit language itself as its subject. "Sanskrit" appears personified in "her" own works. She might be the object of an apostrophizing eulogy, or she might confront her linguistic competitors dramatically. Radhavallabh Tripathi recounts an example of the latter: A. R. Rajaraja Varma's turn-of-the-century *Gairvāṇīvijaya* ("Victory of the Language of the Gods," i.e., Sanskrit).[25] It depicts the lady Sanskrit, "[t]hwarted by the overpowering impact of English and Anglicization," as she "approaches [the god] Brahmā and makes an appeal to save her from oppression." Various Indian languages, along with English, are brought to plea their cases, and Brahmā settles the disputes, telling everyone present "to live peacefully and make room for each other's growth" (Tripathi Introduction 4). Not yet has Sanskrit's death become an inevitable feature of the language, but the seeds are sown. Later authors will find themselves needing to imagine a new birth for their language entirely (see, e.g., Kaṇṭakārjuna). By the time we reach an author like Radhavallabh Tripathi (b. 1949), the issue of language vitality is front and center.

[25] Unfortunately, Tripathi does not give a date and I have been unable to find a copy of the text myself. Varma, however, lived from 1863 to 1918, and his other available works show him to have been active throughout his adult life; hence, my reference to it as a "turn-of-the-century" text

Tripathi's *Laharīdaśakam* will provide this dissertation an opportunity to explore in detail how that vitality is negotiated.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Focusing on the work of scholar-poet A.K. Ramanujan, my first chapter examines the theoretical apparatus that has so far dominated scholarly critique of nostalgia. Ramanujan's original poetry shares with that critique the assumption that nostalgia is a delusive temptation. That assumption, which derives from the concept's Enlightenment origins, leads Ramanujan's poetic persona to a false dichotomy: he must either renounce his nostalgia or defend it by demonstrating his definite access to the past. Unable or unwilling to do either, he attempts to show at least that he knows nostalgia to be indefensible, i.e., bound to fail in its quest for the past. What results is Ramanujan's famously exquisite irony. I argue, however, that this irony represents less a victory over nostalgia's delusions than the further entrenchment of an assumption that postcolonial nostalgia represents a failure to embrace modernity.

By way of escaping that bind, my second chapter turns to translations by the generation of poets to which Ramanujan belonged in order to show what an epistemic focus misses when it looks at nostalgia. When Ramanujan's translations are placed in context alongside those of other post-colonial Indian poet-translators, such as Arun Kolatkar and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, it becomes apparent that their generation attempted what I call a counter-nostalgic (re)vitalization of the English language. That is, they oppose ordinary nostalgia, which they find moribund and cliché, with their own more aesthetically and politically subversive nostalgias. Specifically, they perceive the prevailing poetic English in India as bound by 19th-century Orientalist translation aesthetics, which render it both nationalistic and imperial. To escape that stricture, these poets translate medieval devotional works that were disesteemed by Orientalists. The resulting

translations suggest new styles and affective possibilities that the poets then borrow for their own work without claiming to represent or revive the past "in itself." In so doing, they assemble translingual counter-traditions that oppose both facile globalism and parochial chauvinism.

In order to specify the theory of nostalgia underpinning these literary historical claims, my third chapter turns to Agha Shahid Ali, perhaps the most unabashedly nostalgic poet to emerge from postcolonial South Asia. Free as it is of epistemic preoccupations, his work suggests that nostalgia is best approached phenomenologically. Rather than focus on what images of the past emerge under nostalgia, Ali's poetry invites us to attend to how they emerge and in what contexts. His work thus highlights two aspects of nostalgia that have especially interested phenomenologists: its disruption of the present and the indefiniteness of its object (i.e., the fact that it looks at a present fragment but is "about" an underspecified world of the past). I argue that Ali's early poetry takes advantage, at a thematic level, of the ambiguity of nostalgia's object in order to hold the postcolonial present open to question. Leaving thematics behind, I then turn to Ali's later attempts to write Urdu ghazal poetry in English, which illustrate how nostalgia can be formalized and put to similar use without referring directly to the past at all.

If the first three chapters attest to a shared conviction among a generation of Anglophone South Asian poets that the English available to them was lifeless and that it could only be revitalized with a nostalgic translation from some other language, Chapter 4 sharpens this observation theoretically by turning to another language with a fraught relationship to the present. Radhavallabh Tripathi writes in Sanskrit, a language widely but wrongly believed to be dead. Nonetheless, its perception as dead shapes how it is written, and Tripathi's poetry serves as a case study for how nostalgic attention can fix language as a sign of another time while simultaneously deploying that language to comment on the present. In other words, it shows how

the concept of language death, approached alternately as cause and symptom of nostalgia, can serve as an aesthetically productive lens for viewing the world.

My conclusion reflects on what it might mean to consider certain forms of postcolonial English as analogously "dead" in the sense developed in the context of Tripathi's Sanskrit. Such a question helps highlight the specificity of the place of English in South Asia as well as the multilingualism of which English forms a part, a multilingualism inflected by pervasive nostalgia for pasts when language was in touch with the world.

CHAPTER 1: NOSTALGIC SHAME

INTRODUCTION

Having laid out in the Introduction a brief synopsis of nostalgia theory and its history, I begin the body of the dissertation by turning to a poet whose work exemplifies one important aspect of the postcolonial inheritance of that history, namely shame. That poet is Indian-American Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan (1929-1993), better known simply as A.K. Ramanujan. Ramanujan published in two languages (English and Kannada) and translated into English from five (Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Sanskrit—although the latter two were very infrequently the object of his attention). He remains one of the most acclaimed translators and scholars of South Indian language and culture, with a rich body of work across the three domains of scholarship, translation, and original poetry. This section will be interested primarily in his original poetry as it is inflected by the other two aspects of his work. Chapter 2 will devote more attention to his translation work.

Ramanujan's canonicity within studies of postcolonial poetry—he is discussed in all three of the major monographs on the topic (Ramazani; Bery; Patke)—makes him an ideal place to begin rethinking some of the field's assumptions about nostalgia. Ramanujan is famous for his corrosive and often witty ironies as well as his careful self-reflexiveness. He is also quite obviously obsessed with the past, roughly one sixth of the pages of his *Collected Poems* contains at least one of the following words: memory, reminiscence, remind, the past, forgetting, ghost, remember, ancestral, and history. More oblique references paper the rest of the volume. Such repetitive concern, when filtered through the irony and self-reflexiveness, has earned him a respected position as someone whose relationship to nostalgia is both distanced and nuanced, able to avoid the emotion's pitfalls while also pointing them out. What this chapter argues,

however, is that his ironies and his self-reflexiveness are not quite so simply salutary as critics are inclined to believe. What looks like an escape from nostalgia's clutches is actually, I suggest, the result of being that much more firmly caught in the grip of a particular image of nostalgia as something that would assert things about the world, past and present. It is an image that makes of nostalgia a shameful thing, requiring either guilty acknowledgment or active defense. Ramanujan is too self-aware and honest to choose the latter, but his attempts to acknowledge nostalgia do not eliminate it; they only expose him as still haunted by nostalgia and even less certain of his grip on the world.

In the sections that follow I explore, successively, (1) a key figure of Ramanujan's—"the watchers"—that offers an initial picture of his anxiety and shame, (2) how the trope of being watched plays out across the bulk of his original poetry and what that says about his poetics, (3) the role translation plays in the division of Ramanujan's work and how that division is shaped by nostalgia, and finally (4) the ways in which his understanding of nostalgia limits and conditions what his poetry can do.

1.1 RAMANUJAN'S "WATCHERS" AND THEIR VIEW FROM NOWHERE

We begin not with nostalgia, but with a set of quite different affects, loosely grouped around shame and anxiety. "Anxiety" is the title of a meta-literary poem from Ramanujan's first poetry collection, *The Striders* (1966), but the pervasiveness of the mood in his writing has often been remarked upon, as, for example, by Manmohan Krishna Bhatnagar (143). Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, himself a major voice within the tradition of Indian poetry in English (and a topic of discussion in Chapter 2), has even called it Ramanujan's "major theme" ("Looking" 301). Mehrotra notes, however, that what he means by "anxiety" goes by several names in the poems themselves: "'despair', 'fear', 'anger', 'madness', 'lust'" ("Looking" 301). Mehrotra is

undoubtedly correct that he has uncovered something "major" underpinning a variety of differently named phenomena in Ramanujan's texts, but I think we can sharpen his terminology. I would, for instance, prefer to give categorical primacy not to anxiety but to shame. Mehrotra omits that word from his list, but I will argue that it is really what makes sense of the others. Moreover, I will move shame further into the background than Mehrotra does when he calls it a "theme." Instead, I hold it to be a pervasive mood that colors any given theme that Ramanujan takes up.

One such theme—indeed a "major" one—is nostalgia. What I hope to show in what follows is that these two broad clusters of moods—anxious shame and nostalgia—are co-constituted in the body of work before us. More specifically, Ramanujan's original poems can be taken as so many attempts to stage the shame *of* nostalgia, as well as perhaps to work through it (albeit unsuccessfully). That formulation likely makes clear why I prefer to distinguish between the mood of shame and the theme of nostalgia. Whereas plenty of poems by Ramanujan are anxious or ashamed, very few are nostalgic in anything like the way Agha Shahid Ali's are.[26] Instead, he figures nostalgia as an intrusion, a pitfall, or an embarrassment. My name for the genre thus created will be the "nostalgic shame poem," a conscious echo of what Gillian White calls the "lyric shame poem." At this point in the argument, however, let us stay with particulars, zooming in on a handful of exemplary texts.

A revealing set of figures haunts the third and final volume of original poetry that Ramanujan published during his lifetime, *Second Sight* (1986). Ramanujan calls these figures his "watchers," and they linger silently in the work's background, popping up every now and then

[26] For a discussion of that poetry, see Chapter 4 below.

only to "impose nothing, take no positions" (*Collected* 137).[27] Needless to say, their explicit inactivity far from guarantees their irrelevance. Spread as they are throughout the volume, they suggest a larger structuring force, a way of naming and visualizing the "anxiety" that will provide us our entry into Ramanujan's oeuvre.[28]

The watchers belong to an unmarked series of poems in *Second Sight* which ultimately derive from an earlier, abandoned project called "Composition."[29] Vinay Dharwadker, in his introduction to Ramanujan's *Collected Poems*, describes a late draft shown to him in 1985—now retitled "Elements of Composition"—as "a single, long poem of a few hundred lines arranged in about twenty-five sections. It was a meditation on what we call the 'nature' of self and poetry, interspersed at various points with passages reflecting on certain 'epiphanic' moments in his life" (xxxvii). Dharwadker was impressed by such a "major poem," but Ramanujan remained convinced that the work would be misread if published as is. "He…felt strongly that the formal and thematic unity asserted by the long poem contradicted one of his central insights in it, that his own 'truth is in fragments,'" and besides felt that readers would draw false parallels to other long poems in English (xxxvii). Accordingly, the work was divided, reworked, and scattered across the pages of a collection of other, often quite different poems. The mutual resonance of the fragments-cum-standalone poems was not diminished, however. If anything, the poems exert a gravitational pull across larger swaths of his oeuvre than they otherwise would have as a unity, reinforcing Dharwadker's sense that "Ramanujan's poetry is like a circular labyrinth, in which

[27] Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent citations for Ramanujan's poetry come from his *Collected Poems* (1997).
[28] For the purposes of this section, I will continue to use Mehrotra's term, anxiety, because it more obviously and immediately captures the effect of "the watchers." Shame is a higher-order presence that I will only argue for in the next section, once we better know the basics of the mood we are working with.
[29] For a draft history of this project and its descendants, see Rodríguez (Appendix 2).

all paths lead back to the point from where we start, no matter where we begin" (xxxvi).

Bearing that context in mind, let us examine the watchers themselves—what they are and how they contribute to the larger ethos of Ramanujan's poetry. A reader of *Second Sight* first encounters them in "Questions," the fifth poem of the collection (130-131). It opens rather darkly:

> Eating, being eaten
>
> parts of me watch, parts of me burn,
>
> rarely a clear blue flame
>
> without a sputtering of questions:
>
> why now, where here, why the Down's
>
> syndrome

The "sputtering" continues for another seven lines of increasingly grotesque imagery—"a favourite dog eating puppies / in the garden"—until at last the shock value lies in juxtaposing an opposite—"why the fall into bliss on a cloudy afternoon?" These titular questions, however strikingly posed, are familiar enough in their existential gist. They demand reasons—*ultimate* reasons—for everything, such as it is. What is worth noticing is their origin. "Questions" figures the poet's self as an amalgam of seemingly sadistic "parts" that watch each other burst into flame. Just as chemical impurities make a clear fire spit vivid yellows and greens, something contaminates the clean burn of the poet's self, causing questions to burst forth.

Something shifts in the poem's second section, which can refer—casually, without remark—to "the watchers." The distance and autonomy of that name seems to signal a deeper alienation than was previously implied only by the multiplicity of parts. The scene, though, is not

without its ambiguity. We only infer the continuity of the watchers with the first section's "parts [that] watch." The connection is not stated. Instead, these figures appear as if anew, now in the sputtering questions themselves: *"were the watchers there" at the poet's many rebirths?* As the image of the self is projected further into the past, the watching parts separate further from what they are a part of, until they gain what seems an entirely distinct identity as not just (some) watchers, but *the* watchers—and the watchers of some particular one who can speak independently in the first person. That autonomy carries forth across the rest of *Second Sight*. By the time we get to "Waterfalls in a Bank," a poem about other matters entirely can nonetheless end with "my watchers watch[ing] from their nowhere perches" (190).

Where, though, did they come from—or is that a question that can be specified no further than we already have? Unusually for Ramanujan's work, "Questions" opens with an epigraph that may help: "Two birds on the selfsame tree: / one of them eats the fruit of the tree / the other watches without eating." Also unusual for Ramanujan is its orthodox, Sanskritic provenance in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (3.1.1). In the context of that *Upaniṣad,* the quoted verse offers a miniature allegory, which Ramanujan wittily nods toward with his reference to the tree as "selfsame." His translation, however, otherwise suppresses, among other details, two modifiers that make the allegory more perspicuous. The birds are specifically "fast friends" (*sayujā sakhayā*), united as and until they find themselves "clinging" to their tree. Whereas previously the self, figured dually but unitedly as a pair of birds, must (presumably) have flown unbeholden to the ways of the world, it splits after landing, leaving one half to partake of the delicious fruit while the other looks on. Didactically, but helpfully, the following verse clarifies that one bird is man (*puruṣa*), while the other is God. When the former—now described as grieving in delusion (*śocati muhyamānaḥ*)—sees the latter, he is released of his grief (*vītaśokaḥ*). Nothing ever

explicitly indicates which of the birds is God, but the force of parallelism and the tradition's metaphorics of karmic fruit suggest readily enough that the watcher is God and the eater is man (although here "fruit" is not the more usual, generic *phala* but *pippala*, the specific fruit of the peepal/bodhi tree).

Given the allegorical background, we might still wonder how it informs "Questions." True—that poem, like the Upaniṣadic passage, deals with parts of the self. Likewise, those parts either "watch" or "burn" (the Sanskrit for "grieve" first signifying "burn"). For Ramanujan, however, the confident line between the two sides blurs as the number of parts multiplies indefinitely. In the end, we cannot even say with certainty that each part does not burn and watch in turn, leaving God no special role at all. The unclarity of which parts watch and which burn may be precisely what causes the unevenness of the flame, the titular questions popping out of confusion. Still, as we know, God, or a more menacing, god-like conglomerate eventually does get projected, in all its distinctness, back out into the world, if admittedly with little hope any longer of solace to be found in spotting it, unlike in the more fortunate Upaniṣadic bird of delusion. The result is that the self remains under a constant, if "impotent," surveillance which exceeds any particular social formation or relationship, notably including culture.[30]

The watchers' transcendence of culture is not merely left to be inferred along such convoluted lines, though. It is signaled all but explicitly in the second section of "Questions," where, as noted above, the poet wonders if the watchers had been present for each of the poet's previous births. Birth, incidentally, had been central in the first section too, but less obviously so. Each question had touched on it: the child (born) with Down's syndrome, "the dead twin's cord

[30] The watchers are described as "impotent" in their eponymous "The Watchers" (137), a poem that I will have occasion to reference again shortly below.

of birth / noosed // around his brother's neck," even the dog eating its offspring. The only seeming anomaly is the "fall into bliss," but that too can mean either a tumble into this world or (what amounts to the same thing in its tradition) the Christian Fall from Eden. If that reading seems stretched a bit thin, consider the middle of the long final question, which makes up the entirety of the poem's second section:

> were the watchers there
>
> with me, being born over and over, tearing
> each time through a waterbed paradise,
> the original ocean
>
> of milk, gills for lungs, the whole body
> a sucking at the nipple, a past perfect
> of two in one

The question extends a few lines forward and back, but what I have quoted is sufficient for us to see the piling on of myths and traditions of human genesis. In addition to the perhaps strained reference to the "fall" in section one, this section lets "paradise" pull from "original ocean" a clear echo of "original sin"—a resonance made yet louder with the evocation of a "past perfect," utopia lost. And yet, the original ocean is not of sin but of milk, as in the Buddhist creation myth told in *Aggañña Sutta*. Then, as we progress through the image, "gills for lungs" screams Darwinian evolution, and the "past perfect" of "sucking at the nipple" does likewise for Freudian

psychoanalysis, given Ramanujan's sympathies for each.[31] As if its overtly existential questioning were not enough, the poem draws on every cosmic system at its disposal. The watchers transcend them all, or at least the poet wonders if they do: "were [they] there?"

Whether the watchers were "there" or not, the question itself locates them at a remove from all cultural or historical particularity, even if only imaginatively. "Questions" does not find a more fundamental basis for its watchers than the tree of Vedic times, whose roots may seem for the speaker disappointingly shallow in light of recent encounters with modernity and "Western" modes of thought as well as with counter-Brahminical social and aesthetic movements (such as those Ramanujan himself more usually championed as a scholar and translator). The watchers thus stand outside any particular horizon. The scope of what they watch incorporates even the attempt to make sense of them. As the obviously applicable poem, "The Watchers," puts it, "they watch without questions…they watch even the questions" (137).

Even so, their silence, like the silence of a god, seems to frustrate Ramanujan insofar as they "impose nothing, take no positions" (137)—for presumably they also judge, or at least one might think, as "witnesses," they would have the moral obligation to do so; and yet they do not *act*. As "The Watchers" peevishly observes, "impotence / is their supreme virtue" even as they witness "a Chinese wall // cemented with the bonemeal of friends" (137). Still, inaction aside, the poet himself feels their gaze as a kind of accusation: "my watchers are silent as if / they know my truth is in fragments" (178). As watchers, they know and judge, and so create an image of perfect knowledge as a real possibility, that of taking up "the view from nowhere," as analytic

[31] I draw attention here to the fact that all but the Darwinian story entail a nostalgic narrative—an Eden, a time of pure souls or of perfect communion with the mother. For now, I merely underline it, without commentary. To understand its significance, it is necessary to keep following the our interpretive thread through shame and anxiety.

philosopher Thomas Nagel's resonantly named book puts it. One wonders whether the watchers do not thus, by appealing to the feeling of being seen from such a perspective, provoke, for the poems' persona as for us, the questions that they refuse either to ask or to answer.

But *that* is precisely the issue, how they come to seem to refuse the poet's questions—for that matter, how they come to seem anything at all when their involvement is so far from even the already distant Vedic God whose glimpse at least could relieve man's suffering. And yet, as "The Watchers" insists, "mere seers / they make the scene" (137). Scholars have done an admirable job of drawing out the implications of various thematic strands of what appears on that poetic "scene." Jahan Ramazani, for example, has emphasized the ways in which "Ramanujan indulges but critically revises the genealogical and eschatological impulses of much postcolonial literature and theory" (*Hybrid* 93). Ashok Bery has specified that Ramanujan's poetry is, like "India's cultures" themselves, "palimpsestic, reflexive and translational" (155). And Nakul Krishna has shown how the insistence on sensation and the body disrupts Orientalist stereotypes of Eastern spirituality ("Five Senses"). All of them quote poems like "Questions" and "The Watchers" in support of their claims, and it is not hard to see why, with those poems' intractable commingling of cultures as well as their insistence on the surprise of particulars. As effects or consequences of the perspective and concerns imposed by the figure of the watchers, these are undoubtedly salutary, as the above scholars testify. However, I am interested in the question why and how the watchers come to play such a role, and how far their influence extends into the rest of Ramanujan's work. Phrased otherwise to remove any poetic literalism, my question concerns the extent to which the watchers are an apt, concrete figuration for a much larger structuring aesthetic that shapes the basic projects of Ramanujan's original poetry. I have already claimed that they are, and to illustrate how, I turn to a handful of poems unrelated to "Composition" and

its *Second Sight* descendants.

1.2 THE SHAME OF BEING WATCHED

That the watchers might be a figure for anxiety—epistemic, moral or otherwise—is clear enough. I have, however, recurrently mentioned shame as equally relevant to Ramanujan's poetics. How shame fits into the picture I have been sketching around the watchers thus remains to be shown, as do the stylistic quirks that reveal both shame and anxiety outside its explicit naming in watcher-figures. These will be the principal aims of the following section. Below we will see how, on a thematic level, Ramanujan figures the writing experience itself as alienating and productive of an anxiogenic gaze, and, on a stylistic level, how Ramanujan's poetry is imbued with shame in (among others) the following four ways: it implicates the reader, it suppresses context, it surprises in order to shame us for being surprised, and it raises questions unanswerably. How these are related to shame can only be shown by way of examples.

Let us begin with the most basic phenomenon the watchers ought to inspire us to look for elsewhere in Ramanujan's work: the experience of being seen. Conveniently enough, being seen figures centrally in one of Ramanujan's finest meta-poems, the posthumously published "The Black Hen." The poem is fairly brief, running in its entirety:

> It must come as leaves
> to a tree
> or not at all
>
> yet it comes sometimes
> as the black hen
> with the red round eye

on the embroidery

stitch by stitch

dropped and found again

and when it's all there

the black hen stares

with its round red eye

and you're afraid. (195)

The opening stanza channels Keats' famous injunction that poetry be natural: "if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all" (Letter to John Taylor). Nothing, however, puts these words irrevocably in the mouth of Keats or anyone else; they belong as much and as sincerely to the voice of the poem as to any other. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the sentiment that "it had better not come at all" does not conflict with what follows, which can be read at least as much as an expression of regret—that something came when nothing would have been better—as a rebuttal—that Keats was wrong to say how poetry "must" come. However he feels about it, for Ramanujan, the poem is a fitful, half-blind pursuit that yields much more than bargained for.[32]

Notice how, stylistically, the "The Black Hen" implicates readers in its fraught emotions and uncertainties. Not only does it appeal to a colloquial "you" rather than the more formal

[32] The persona in this poem remains ambiguously fond of Keats' idea. The "actual" Ramanujan attested in his diary that he took the idea as his "belief and practice" (quoted in Rodríguez 443).

"one" or personal "I," it uses the basic movement of the poem to reinforce the reader's passivity and alienated paralysis, much like the depicted poet's. Formally, "The Black Hen" is tightly controlled, almost as if its writer is attempting to hold at bay the forces his work necessarily releases. The breezy cadence of the opening leaves (which really belong to the musical Keats) gives way to the increasingly emphatic and punctuated line endings of the second and fourth stanzas, which mirror each other around the central "stitching." As enjambment diminishes, metrical stress falls equally on the two syllables of "black hen," and then on the trisyllable "black hen stares." These stresses initiate a slow-down that reaches its climax with the stanza's closing "round red eye," a verbal sequence that nearly demands pause between each word and certainly demands one afterward, before the reader breaks to the next stanza for the final "and you're afraid." That last line, hanging there in the space of an otherwise empty page, fails to complete the poem's obvious visual as well as metrical symmetry around the center. That final emptiness is where the terror of the poem resides, as it "looks" at you from the intimidating eye that must lie behind the blankness. We readers, like the poet, feel both subject and object of a "stare," the line hanging as it does in uncertain incompleteness.

Such strategies for implicating the reader find a complement in a second tendency of Ramanujan's exemplified by "The Black Hen": its careful suppression of context. We are never told what "it" is and can only infer from our knowledge of Keats and of Western poetic conventions more broadly, with their marked tendency toward meta-poetry. Part of the anxious ominousness of the poem comes from the need to conjecture and stand in the uncertainty of that conjecture. The suppression of context in general is common enough in Ramanujan's poetry, but

the specific repetition of vague and threatening "its" is remarkable.[33] Even poem titles alone prove the point: "Any Cow's Horn Can Do It," "When It Happens," even, simply, "It." In each case, our lack of knowledge about "it" sets an off-kilter tone that veers toward both anxiety (that it could be something bad) and shame (that we don't know what it is).

A third tendency—really a deepening and fusing of tendencies one and two—lies in what we might all Ramanujan's poetics of shameful surprise, where poet and reader alike either bumble our way through some confusion or confidently walk down what seems an easy path until, in either case, a surprise that should not have been a surprise hits us in the face. In "The Black Hen," this shock takes the somewhat minor form of realizing that the eye poses a kind of threat only at the end, when it is too late, and despite the eye's being clearly named and anticipated throughout the poem, while "we" were stitching it together (a monstrous image for how to make an eye, outside the explicit context of embroidery). That sense that "I should have known better"—the dark reverse side of Ramanujan's preferred brand of suspense—haunts much of his poetry. (I will explore a more overt example below when I take up Ramanujan's nostalgia more explicitly.) Occasionally the mistake is pinned on other people, as in "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day," where an Indian professor visiting Nazi Germany mistakes the meaning of a swastika for a sign of home and comfort. Generally, however, the fault is either the poet's or his addressee's, which often enough amounts to the same thing. As "Time and Time Again" makes clear, though, at least sometimes our feeling of insufficiency is meant to register

[33] For examples of other techniques of suppressed context, see Ramanujan's predilection for opening poems in the middle of a train of thought, without introduction, as for example when he opens a poem with the word "and": "And search / for certain thin- / stemmed bubble-eyed water bugs" (3) or "And that woman / beside the wreckage van / on Hyde street" (15). The latter also illustrates the use of deixis that we lack access to (we are presumed to be familiar with "that woman," but we, as readers, are in fact not).

the fact that there is *never* enough context. That poem is about clocktowers (and hence regularity), until, as it says toward its end, "One day you look up and see one of them / eyeless, silent, a zigzag sky showing // through the knocked-out clockwork, after a riot" or some other unpredictable occurrence like "a night of lightnings" (64). The regularity of a stable context can always be disrupted by the irruption of the random, the irregular, the violent. That knowledge—viz., of insufficient knowledge—is a driving force across Ramanujan's work.

To underscore and clarify the role the inadequacies of knowing play more broadly in Ramanujan's poetry, consider "No Amnesiac King." "One knows by now one is no amnesiac / king," it opens. Although the "you" of "The Black Hen" has shifted formal registers to "one," the basic move is the same. Already, too, we are enlisted on the side of the poet, who needs reminding—chiding, really—of what he is not. ("You know by now," said other than to signpost an academic lecture, carries with it an implicit *but*—"but you don't act like it.") Even that reminder seems insufficient. As the poem goes on, after seven couplets developing the fantasy, the next stanza is a fragment, "Or so it seems," pushed all the way to the right of the page, breaking the train of thought and the confidence behind it:

Or so it seems

as I wait for my wife and watch the traffic
in seaside marketplaces and catch

my breath at the flat-metal beauty of whole pomfret,
round staring eyes and scales of silver

in the fisherman's pulsing basket,
and will not ask, for I know I cannot,

which, if any, in its deadwhite belly
has an uncooked signet ring and a forest

legend of wandering king (126-127)

A handful more lines round out the poem, but already in the quoted portion we see the staring-eye motif, the unexpected shift of and to particulars (from "one" to "I" and from fantasy to harsh reality), paralysis, and Ramanujan's ever-intractable doubt.

As with the epigraph to "The Watchers," understanding that doubt requires us to know something of Indian, particularly Brahminical Sanskrit, mythology. The poem plays on the story of Kālidāsa's famous fifth-century play, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, in which a king falls in love with young woman in a remote hermitage, named Śakuntalā, only to forget her at a crucial point in the narrative. A ring is supposed to revive his memory, the token he left with her when last they met. The ring, however, is lost before the king fatefully denies Śakuntalā his love and a rightful place in the palace for her and their joint son. When the ring is eventually found in the belly of a fish, the king realizes what he has done and is wracked with guilt. Eventually, happy endings ensue and everyone is reunited. "No Amnesiac King," then, is basically a poignant tarrying with the knowledge that life is no fairy tale. The poignancy lies in the difficulty of "successfully" knowing this. Sure, "by now" the poet knows happy endings do not come so easily or definitively. Still, he cannot help but project his literature-inspired fantasies on the world around him.

What interests me centrally is the shame that undergirds the poem. The opening line—"One knows by now"—attests to it in ways we have already seen, but also in the perspectiveless becoming-object of the poet-subject of the scene. When the poet refers to himself as "one," he speaks as if observing someone else from some other distant but unspecified position. He becomes an object, and yet he does so by projecting his feelings onto an imagined other. In other words, he speaks as if from the position of his watchers. In noticing this, I believe we have arrived at a point where we can begin to articulate the connections between anxiety and shame in this poetry.

Being seen can take many affective forms: guilt at being caught, arousal (or disgust) at being checked out, fear at being spotted, embitterment at being monitored, or anxiety at being scrutinized. The affects of Ramanujan's poems, although they flirt with that last possibility—anxiety—shade more obviously into shame. Anxiety requires uncertain outcomes, a question whether failure or some other disaster will strike. Ramanujan's poems, though, have far too vague a sense of what success would even look like. What would it mean successfully to know that "one is no amnesiac king"? We might be able to answer that question if Ramanujan wished simply to contrast knowledge with an obvious delusion, such as a well-known beggar imperiously commanding passersby to go search fish stalls for his missing ring. But Ramanujan's speaker does know that he is not *simply* an amnesiac king; what he cannot let go of is deeper than propositional mis-knowledge of that sort.

Shame is famously both individuating and de-individuating in this way, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for example, has observed (37). This is particularly obvious in cases where—unlike in "No Amnesiac King"—one's shame really does stem from some anonymous one's behavior. (Sedgwick gives the example of an "unwashed, half-insane man" walking into the hall mid-

lecture to harangue anyone and no one before urinating at the front of the room—the audience would cringe in shame.) But "No Amnesiac King" forces the speaking "I" to feel his particular shame on top of what shame he imagines emanating from the fact that other people, too—specifically families—believe it: "whatever mother may say or child believe" (126). Moreover, we are reminded in the second stanza that the temptation to believe the stories is not new. The problem is longstanding, and it is only now that he is trying to let the stories go: "One cannot wait any more in the back / of one's mind for" that fairy-tale chain of events (126). The message is clear: the poet needs to grow up and accept reality, which is (as will become central to my argument later) a prototypical example of anti-nostalgic shaming.

Consider one other characteristic of shame relevant to understanding "No Amnesiac King," namely the "proto-form" so often taken by that affect: "eyes down, head averted" (Sedgwick 36). While Ramanujan's persona in the poem does not look away, he does stress that he "will not ask, for I know I cannot." Interpretively, that "cannot" leads in a number of directions—to ask would not be sincere, the poet would not be understood—but most relevantly for us, it suggests that he is too ashamed to ask. I saved this aspect of the poet's shame for last, because it requires us to delved deeper into an issue that may seem to lead temporarily away from shame per se (to which we shall return).

Specifically, we must observe that there is actually a broader self-reinforcing pattern in Ramanujan's poetry—a feature common enough to delineate a genre—wherein Ramanujan raises unanswerable questions, i.e., questions that he refuses to let be answered, questions posed *unanswerably*. These questions recall the watchers not only because those figures too refuse properly to ask questions, but more importantly because they cannot, by virtue of being what they are, answer any questions posed them—and nearly all Ramanujan's questions in the

"Composition" sequence seem to want the watchers' answers. Indeed, Ramanujan's persists across the board in its occupation with the privately raised question.

Let me underscore that persistence by stepping away momentarily from Ramanujan's poetry in order to observe a moment from a novella Ramanujan published in Kannada, *Someone Else's Autobiography* (1978). Made available to English readers in the straightforwardly titled, *Poems and a Novella*, a collection of translations of Ramanujan's works in Kannada, *Someone Else's Autobiography* tells the life story of K.K. Ramanujan as provoked by a chance encounter with a doppelgänger of sorts, A.K. Ramanujan. Barely concealed in fiction, it closely echoes the authorial Ramanujan's own interests and life. What draws my attention now is its fifth chapter, in which K.K. Ramanujan wonders about possible "other" siblings than the four his family acknowledges. He "feels" that he has another brother, and he is "certain" that he has another sister. The only shape the latter certainty takes in narration, however, pertains to *which* girl his extra sister is; he never establishes how he came to know that any such sister should exist. Quite plausibly, he has only found a girl on whom to cathect the doubts that in his extra brother's case remain free-wheeling.

What is striking in the narration is the constant rhetoric of suspicion and conjecture: "As far as I know," "I have suspected," "This would account for the strange sounds," "I sometimes think," and "I kept feeling" all appear in the first paragraph of the chapter's speculations (225). The narrator's logic is that of the paranoiac. He has conjectured that his brother must have gone to Africa; then he finds a photo of someone his mother claims is "the son of our uncle's first wife. He went away to Africa or somewhere." To which the narrator responds (to reader alone, crucially), "Africa again! Just as I thought" (226). The narrator quite explicitly never manages to bring the matter to speech throughout his life. At age 12, when he becomes convinced he knows

who his sister is, he finds himself "agitated and anxious to investigate these matters further." Naturally, there is an obvious solution: "I wanted to question all of them directly," he admits, "the woman at the post office [who he supposes to be his sister], Amma, Appa. My opinion about them had changed completely. I was scared. I couldn't trust anyone in Ontikoppal" (228).

Granted, the generic context is quite different, and narrative invites other considerations than Ramanujan's poetry; thus K. K. Ramanujan is paranoid in ways quite different from the persona of Ramanujan's poetry. Even so, one parallel is hard to ignore. Both figures easily imagine their way into other perspectives from which the answers to their questions become themselves suspect. K. K. Ramanujan's paranoia means that his parents answers would remain ever suspect. A. K. Ramanujan's answer, say, to "why here, why now," would remain suspect for its incompleteness, for its being given from within life rather than outside it. In other words, both are skeptics in the strongest sense of the word—people before whom the world withers as they wonder at it. "I [am] wedded to doubt / and only married to a woman," as the speaker of one of poem puts it (168).

It may sound like a stretch to say that such a familiar question as "why did this child have to be born with Down's syndrome?" is asked inappropriately, as if Ramanujan raises the question only to create the existential crisis of which it is obviously an expression. One might also feel tempted to retort that any poem comes with a level of artifice that requires "creating" the problem it wants to raise. I hardly deny that. It is nonetheless the case that Ramanujan is a poet who opens abysses between himself and the world, between himself and others. We will discuss more examples below, but it may help in this context to recall philosopher Stanley

Cavell's work on skepticism.[34] Cavell suggests that philosophical skepticism is a matter of mood, something we sometimes work ourselves into when we think metaphysically about the world around us. One of his key insights is that this mood is intractable. One cannot think one's way out of or "solve" skeptical problems; one can only find oneself simply back in the ordinary world we hold in common. One danger of skepticism carried too far is that it leads to a refusal of commonness, a denial that we live together in a shared world.[35] When Ramanujan, in "Drafts," scans a Chicago crowd, he struggles to make each and any face into the "Hyde Park rapist's face" (157), and thus shows the hostile turn that his skepticism can take.

But we have left shame behind, or at least we seem to have. Let us find it again. Ramanujan's watchers, if productive of shame (at, e.g., inadequately knowing the world), are also thereby productive of skepticism, which in turn reinforces the pressure of the watchers' gaze. There is a vicious circle here, and it is not without its pleasures. Ramanujan's exquisite irony rests on it, and it is therefore the source of much aesthetic satisfaction. It is also the source of his poetry's "reflective" and "critical" outlook on the world, which—we saw above—critics like Ramazani and Bery praise. That will be the topic of the next section, which will finally draw nostalgia explicitly into our picture. My point, however, will be less to share in their critical valorization of Ramanujan's critical tendencies than to point out those tendencies' connections

[34] My summary here can only be a pitiful sketch of what Cavell painstakingly sets out and explores in works spanning his career. My summary, though, draws most heavily on his extended discussion of skepticism in *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*.

[35] For Cavell, that might at times be taken as a virtue; the ability to see that you and I do not live in the same world can be powerful in your or my attempts to change things and to find new ways of holding the world in common. In any case, Cavell acknowledges what he calls "the truth of skepticism" (47), arguing that trying to refute skepticism is still to stay inside it. What I am not say, therefore, is that Ramanujan is *wrong*, only that he tarries in this realm at some risk, and certainly in active threat to any sense of community he claims to seek.

with more ambiguously productive and helpful phenomena such as postcolonial shame and the false universalizing of scholarly values.

1.3 TRANSLATION AND NOSTALGIA

My desire in this section is to re-describe what other scholars have already made familiar with respect to nostalgia in Ramanujan's poetry. My claim is not so much that they are wrong as that they have considered the poetic situation rather narrowly and so praise too easily and unequivocally what may be worth interrogating a deeper level. The scholar whose work will set the initial terms for this discussion is Rajeev Patke, who offers one of the more synoptic visions of Ramanujan's life work, linking his poetry to his translations and vice versa.

Patke's larger goal is to "illustrate the homology between translation and migration" in postcolonial poetry (*Postcolonial* 228). To do so in Ramanujan's case, he treats Ramanujan's original poetry as attesting to the experience of migration, which in turn explains and motivates the work his translations do:

> The relationship of Ramanujan's poems in English to his translations is antithetical, like the relationship between a photographic image and its negative. The activity of translation seeks to recover from an invoked and imagined past a plenitude that is lacking in the poet's own life and times. (228)

The exact terms of Patke's description are debatable, but the basic insight seems valid. Ramanujan's translation work does carry a different, even opposite, charge compared to that of his original poetry. What concerns me, however, is the extent to which Patke naturalizes such a relationship, i.e., assumes that we know just what migration is and means in general. I quote him at some length so that we get a clear sense of his interpretive tack:

> Ramanujan's poetic world is the narrative of a three-part journey…In the first

> instance, the world to which the poet migrates is represented as depletion. The self feels isolated, without a sense of connectedness to a community. The second stage of this journey turns to a world compounded of memory, fiction, and desire, in order to recollect or invent a realm of possibility in which the self and all its modes of thought, feeling, and action are connected to a communal way of life. The final stage of the figurative journey entails using language to bring the remembered and imagined past to bear on the present through the activity of translation. (229)

In the prior quotation, Patke was careful to qualify the past as possibly "imagined," and here he extends the hedge to the present, which is only "represented" as a lack. Even with such cautiousness, however, Patke's account still relies on the assumption that the basic narrative (of depletion, desire, restitution and the causal relationship among them) is true at least to the subjective experience of the poet—true, moreover, of a certain kind of migrancy more broadly, not just of Ramanujan's in particular. That is to say, Patke naturalizes a specific kind of nostalgic desire as a common, worldly condition that precedes any articulation in, say, poetry. To put the consequences in terms of the specifics of Ramanujan's poetry before us, Patke locates the shame and anxiety that I have been discussing in the "depletion" or lack that spurs the eventual translation work that will provide some recompense. If that is so, the consequences for what I have been arguing would be significant, so I want to spend some time unpacking this particular box of concerns.

To begin, I want to muddy the waters between the two "antitheses" of Ramanujan's poetry and translation. Translation, after all, also appears *within* Ramanujan's original work, most conspicuously as a word: in one poem, the poet "must translate and turn," as if roasted on a

spit, in his "own particular hell" (34); in another, he "guess[es]" that his "mother's migraines translate…/ into [his own] allergies, a fear of black cats / and a daughter's passion // for bitter gourd and Dostoevsky" (158). Neither use suggests much confidence. From a perspective such as Patke's, the first must look like an excellent example of the regret Ramanujan faces in needing to translate in the first place. He finds himself doomed to oscillate between an image of the past and the fact of the present, never quite satisfied on either side.[36] The second passage only underscores the strained ambitions and "guess"-work of translation, i.e., that it never quite is what it claims to be.

Perhaps more revealingly, translation also appears in Ramanujan's poems in the subtler guise of sudden resemblance, i.e., moments of mental "translation" that intrude on present consciousness: "And then one sometimes sees waterfalls / as the ancient Tamils saw them, / wavering snakeskins, // cascades of muslin" (189). By now we should be trained to see that "one" as an alienated pointer to the poet himself, and it is. Ramanujan is one of the few people who would see such waterfalls (decorations in a Chicago bank) in those terms, since he is among the first translators of ancient Tamil poetry, indeed one of its "re-discoverers." On the face of it, then, the moment depicted would seem to be one where the "world to which [Ramanujan] has migrated appears meaningful only when related to the world migrated from, in nostalgic double focus" (Patke 229). And yet, as the alienated pronoun, "one," already intimates, "meaning" may not be so readily available, even in the stereoscopy of a nostalgic vision. Indeed, this is one of the watchers' poems, so the absence of answers or restfulness is unsurprising.

[36] A challenge to this reading is that the "hell" in which translation happens is "only in my hindu [sic] mind." That is to say, it is part of an explicit and utter refusal of what the speaker calls being "modern": "Yes, I know all that. I should be modern / Marry again. See strippers a the Tease / Touch Africa. Go to the movies…But sorry, I cannot unlearn // the conventions of despair…I must seek and will find / my particular hell only in my hindu mind" (34).

One of the poem's more vivid "translations" (if translation of a less literal/literary sort than the calqued waterfall metaphor) underscores the extent to which Ramanujan's work often finds nostalgic translation to be a cruel joke or embarrassment, even when it technically (or seemingly) provides the kind of "plenitude" that Patke suggests:

> As I hear the waters fall, the papers
>
> rustle, and it's evening: a paralytic sadhu,
>
> tapdancer of St. Vitus's dance,
>
> knocking his steps out on the pebbles
>
> with no reflexes left in either knee,
>
> lifts with his one good finger
>
> his loincloth, and pisses standing
>
> like a horse on my childhood's dark
>
> sidestreet, aiming his stream
>
> at two red flowers on the oleander bush,
>
> as a car turns the corner.
>
> Headlights make his arc
>
> a trajectory of yellow diamonds,
>
> scared instant rainbows, ejecting spurts
>
> of crystal, shocked

by the commonplace cruelty of headlights. (190)

The translations here are so absorptive of the poet's attention that not only does the *material* of the present vanish, so does the passage of time. From standing in a well-lit bank, we jump suddenly, inexplicably to a dark street-corner, where (presumably) a homeless Chicagoan relieves himself in the alley and viscerally recalls the memory of a "similar" scene from the poet's childhood.The striking scene has caught the attention of two recent scholars, Jahan Ramazani and Akshaya Kumar. Ramazani is quite impressed, and his enthusiasm is worth quoting at length:

> This startling confluence of Western modernity and an ancient Eastern way of life produces an epiphanic moment, when, to speak a little grandly of an old man's urination, both liquid and light seem transfigured into something beyond themselves—either East or West, precolonial or postcolonial. A luminous 'exchange of contexts,' this climactic image figures in part Ramanujan's own poetry: a humble world lit up by poetic form, an ancient sensibility started by its encounter with modernity, a traditional Brahman past metamorphosed by the onset of the Western present—in short, a metaphor-making poesis that hybridizes and transfigures its cultural resources. (*Hybrid* 80)

Akshaya Kumar, inspired by Ramazani's interpretation, finds that the poem "speaks volumes of the spiritual impoverishment of the West" if even a sadhu's *urine* become transcendent (74). While, on one level, both critics are correct in their remarks, they miss something essential when they leave out the enveloping shame and anxiety of the watchers. The voice of the poem *knows* that to see the piss in this light is shameful—not for Western modernity (no one else on the

sidewalk fawns over the aesthetics of the urine) but for the one who misses home enough that such a sight could constitute a moment of nostalgic ecstasy, ruined by the "cruel" ordinariness of a car driving by. We are faced with a poem that figures translation as reckless, offering a silly sort of comfort with no connection to reality, just as we were with "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day," where the Indian professor in Nazi Germany mistranslated the German swastika. That is, in general, how nostalgia (and nostalgic translation, its most common form) figures in Ramanujan's poetry—as a shameful intrusion. The poem just prior to "Waterfalls in a Bank," "Chicago Zen," not only confirms this but offers a mockery of the seeming alternative, presentism.

"Chicago Zen" is one of Ramanujan's most explicit thematic engagements with nostalgia as well as one of his most despairing moments of self-accusation. The four-part poem begins simply enough. The first section consists of four condescending lines, "Now tidy your house, / dust especially your living room // and do not forget to name / all your children" (186). The heckling tone continues in the second section, which advises to "[w]atch your step. Sight may strike you blind" in ways more or less identical to the pissing scene we have already seen (now it is a battery of visions vaguely associated with India—so vaguely as to include in the end simply "drown[ing], eyes open, // towards the Indies, the antipodes"). The third section echoes a phrase we have already seen: "Now you know what you always knew," only here the thing that "you" live in denial of is not the falsity of fairy tales, but the falsity of nostalgia's promises more generally. Each form of homecoming the nostalgic might hope for is dismissed:

> the country cannot be reached
>
> by jet. Nor by boat on a jungle river,

hashish behind the Monkey-temple,

nor moonshot to the cratered Sea

of Tranquility,

The list continues, eventually finishing,

Nor by any

other means of transport,

migrating with a clean, valid passport

no, not even by transmigrating

without any passport at all (187)

The only solution is to live in the now, which (for Ramanujan at least) is no solution at all, as the fourth and final section makes clear:

Watch your step, watch it, I say,

especially at the first high

threshold,

and the sudden low

one near the end

of the flight

of stairs,

and watch

for the last

step that's never there. (188)

As a vision of presentism to combat nostalgia, that is pretty bleak. The line breaks taunt with possible closure only to subvert it. The "first high" and "sudden low" could each refer to emotions. Likewise "the end" suggests death, until "flight" counters that maybe the diasporic subject of the poem flew home after all; but no—it is a flight of stairs that end. Except they don't really end either, for the last step is "never there," a pun on the contradictory possibilities that the step is missing and that it is never reached. Couple such paradox with the previous section's undignified capstone advice to heed "all calls of nature," and it begins to seem that poet offers less a critique of nostalgia than a picture of nostalgia mocking itself upon realizing that once it starts thinking in terms of sight and seeing the world right, there is no escape.

We can observe now that what Patke calls Ramanujan's "nostalgic double focus" deprives his world of meaning; it does not give real plenitude—or more precisely, nostalgic double focus is what ironically holds out the possibility of meaning only to pull the rug out from under it at the last minute, while "the watchers watch, from their nowhere perches." The mutual imbrication of nostalgia, shame, and anxiety of Ramanujan's poetry is thus quite clear. We must be careful not to the former to an effect of the latter to causes. If anything, as the next section shows, nostalgia holds a privileged place among the origins of shame (at least to the extent that anything has an origin in Ramanujan's poetry).

1.4 THE NOSTALGIC SHAME POEM

As we have seen, Ramanujan's original poems rarely *indulge* nostalgia, they prefer to observe it cooly. Rarely is not never, though. "Prayers to Lord Murugan" has enough nostalgic trappings—

plangency, poignance, unabashed desire—to justify proving the rule. Exceptional though it is, "Prayers to Lord Murugan" is one of Ramanujan's most famous poems, iconic and personal enough to warrant reading at his funeral (Krishna 348). What interests me here is that, speaking later of his experience writing the poem, Ramanujan feels the need almost to apologize: "I had felt…that the future needed a new past. Many things have changed since then and so have I. But the mood, the relation to what the god Murugan means, is a real one, and I hope it speaks not only for me" (CE 192). The tone of these remarks is hardly, in any straightforward way, ashamed, but the impulse to distance and to hedge is striking. When discussing other of his poems, he does not adopt such an uncertain posture, so I find it worth investigating and commenting on.

First, a fuller description of the poem itself is in order. "Prayers to Lord Murugan" is a capstone sequence of eleven short poems in Ramanujan's second volume of poetry in English, *Relations* (*Collected Poems* 113-117). As a footnote to the poem suggests, Lord Murugan is an "[a]ncient Dravidian god of fertility, joy, youth, beauty, war, and love. He is represented as a six-faced god with twelve hands" (113). The titular prayers revolve around a tonally shifting but essentially nostalgic set of entreaties: "Lord / of faces // find us the face / we lost early / this morning" or, to quote the ninth section in full,

> Deliver us O presence
> from proxies
> and absences
>
> from sanskrit [sic] and the mythologies
> of night and the several

roundtable mornings

of London and return
the future to what
it was.

As this excerpt makes clear, the horizon for these prayers is explicitly postcolonial. The entreaties even take a punning shot at Macaulay's infamous Minute: "Master of red bloodstains, / our blood is brown; our collars white" (116). They are also fairly clearly inflected by Ramanujan's translation work.

Although the fundamental thrust of the work is nostalgic, the tone at the surface level can be quite exuberant. "Lord of new arrivals / lovers and rivals: / arrive," begins the first section. The play of phonemes, coupled with the fertility and vitality of the god so invoked, lends a sense of excitement that is met by following images of "cockfight and banner-/dance," of a scene where, "on this and the next three / hills // women's hands and the garlands / on the chests of men will turn like / chariotwheels" (113). Even the "despondency" of the sections where the poet calls out the degraded present ripples with the energy of close observation, playful juxtaposition, and phonetic delight:

We eat legends and leavings,
remember the ivory, the apes,
the peacocks we sent in the Bible
to Solomon, the medicines for smallpox,
the similes

for muslin: wavering snakeskins,

a cloud of steam. (115)

Here we see the first published occurrence of the phrase that will later haunt Ramanujan's stereoscopic vision in some Chicago bank: wavering snakeskins. As if the force of that metaphor demanded juxtaposition with urine, the next lines deliver it: "Ever rehearsing astronauts / we purify and return / our urine // to the circling body" (115). Note the difference in context, however. What is here a wry joke becomes in the later work a bitter pill swallowed because nothing else remains. The form of the prayer keeps open the hope that one might be "delivered" from the image, which here is voluntarily recalled; later it will come as an unwanted and inescapable flash of metaphorical conjunction.

Why, though, does Ramanujan hesitate quite to endorse the poem upon later reflection? He does not say explicitly, other than to note that "[m]any things have changed since then and so have I" (117). On a historical level, certainly, changes did occur. Notably, Ramanujan tells us he wrote "Prayers to Lord Murugan" in 1967. He was serving as reader for a dissertation on Murugan by Fred Clothey at the University of Chicago. Ramanujan himself, however, was in Madras (now Chennai). As he read the chapters "a series of prayers formed themselves in [his] head" (*Collected Essays* 192). The resulting poem "talks about some Indian attitudes to the Indian past, with which [he] was somewhat despondently preoccupied at the time" (192). Specifically, he felt at the time "that Sanskrit itself and all that it represented had become an absence, at best a crippling and not an enabling presence, that the future needed a new past" (192). 1967 is a notable year to have been thinking such things, as it falls in a period of agitation in Madras State. In 1965, movement from the center to push for the Sanskrit-derived Hindi as the sole official language for the country led to intense backlash in the South. 1967 saw the Indian

National Congress party lose its hold in Madras State to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, a party dedicated to advancing Dravidian identity and interests. Since then the Congress Party has never regained control in the state. In keeping with the pro-Dravidian sentiments of the ruling coalition, Madras State was renamed Tamil Nadu in 1969. Accordingly, we can observe that some of what changed for Ramanujan between the writing of and remarking on "Prayers to Lord Murugan" is the contextual tenor of a claim that "sanskrit" (lower case in original) has become stifling.[37]

Convincing though it is in its particulars, I am not convinced that the historical reading exhausts what is important about Ramanujan's partial disavowal of his poem. Specifically, I suspect that some of what separates him from the poem is less a matter of external "changes" than of newfound self-consciousness about the text's sincerity. A poet famous for his ironies may flinch when faced with a text where his watchers were kept so far at bay—even though "Prayers to Lord Murugan" is not exactly bereft of irony (cf. the self-reference to "wavering snakeskins" or the closing request to "cure us at once / of prayers"). When the poem asks for deliverance from "sanskrit" or requests that the "Lord of the sixth sense / give us back / our five senses," it can sound like the poet is all to certain of what is lacking in the present and where in the past the solution might be found. A more typical pose for Ramanujan to strike would have him seeing that legends and leavings are all there is for the eating, that Lord Murugan is no more available for the poet's address than are his watchers.

Both Ramazani and Patke have pointed to the cause of Ramanujan's worries and shame over nostalgia, albeit somewhat unwittingly. As Patke puts it, Ramanujan's poetry attests to the

[37] In terminology I will develop more fully in the next chapter, I would call this a clear example of a counter-nostalgia, i.e., an opposition to one nostalgia (Sanskritic) by means of another, generally less hegemonic nostalgia (here Dravidian).

experience of life "as if it were a text without contexts" (232). That notion plays well with his suggestion (aiming for wider reference than Ramanujan specifically) that there is a "homology between translation and migration." If migration is like moving a text from one context to another, then the inapt or unfamiliar context of the receiving culture can make the migrant too feel decontextualized. Ramazani, it would seem, agrees, albeit articulating his homology somewhat differently, now between metaphor and postcoloniality.[38] Because of that resonance, he says, "the postcolonial experience is especially amenable to aesthetic expression" (*Hybrid* 75).

The question I want to raise, which neither Ramazani nor Patke does, concerns why life is being lived as a text in the first place—with or without context. In Ramanujan's specific case, several facts present what seem the obvious answers. Ramanujan was a textual scholar, holding distinguished professorship at the University of Chicago. He was also a translator, likely more famous as such than as an original poet. So for Ramanujan to worry about what it means to present a text to a new culture is easily taken for granted. What is less easily taken for granted is the notion that his life is a kind of text (presented for whom to read?). Any scene in life can be "read." That is clear from the poetry Ramanujan produces as well as from experience, but to start reading any given scene requires motivation. Ordinarily, such motivation is situated, exhausted as soon as the occasion itself fizzles. For Ramanujan's poems, however, the reading is skeptical, as we have seen. It lacks context for asking, which is why it finds the answer and its (inevitably limited) context endlessly insufficient.

The answer to how Ramanujan ends up in such an aesthetic bind is undoubtedly

[38] In an earlier version of his argument, Patke had claimed that the "homology [was] between metaphor, diaspora, and translation," making the parallelism that much more evident between the arguments ("Ambivalence").

overdetermined. I am nevertheless convinced by Patke's suggestion that, for Ramanujan, translation and original poetry are caught in a nostalgic cycle (assuming we attenuate the certainty of Patke's tripartite narrative and its clear directionality), and I am inclined also to add, given the poems we have read, that Ramanujan's awareness of its being a *nostalgic* cycle is part of what fuels its movement. That is to say, he assumes (or, perhaps, in his eyes, "knows" from experience) that a nostalgic person wants an "absolute" reproduction of the text in the target culture, of the past in the present. As a result, it is easy to use a poem to explore how that desire and its underlying assumptions fall shamefully apart under the cold external gaze which the desire itself invites. As this dissertation argues, however, that is not the only mode of apprehending or pursuing nostalgia—it is not even the only mode of apprehending *Ramanujan's* nostalgia, as is shown by his translation work, "Prayers to Lord Murugan," and other poems more stylistically than thematically concerned with his translations.

Scholars have made much of the "self-proclaimed failures" of Ramanujan's poetry, in particular as the means by which his poems produce their own kind of (ethical) success (Nerlekar "Converting" 128). They are correct to do so. Anjali Nerlekar, for example, has carefully shown how Ramanujan stages the failure of the usual nationalist-nostalgic move to metaphorize women as the site of tradition and lost origins. "In this awareness of the limitations of his usage of the patriarchal discourse," she claims, "he transcends that discourse" (144). Ashok Bery, as mentioned above, has made similar arguments about identity and nationalism. What these scholars have missed, however, is that Ramanujan's original poetry are still part of the larger nostalgia discourse that they critique (and feel ashamed for not critiquing enough, for not stopping the feeling of nostalgia in the first place). His poems are, I suggest, part of a broader genre of poems that we might call "nostalgic shame poems" after American poetry scholar

Gillian White's "lyric shame poems."

By "lyric shame," White means "primarily shame experienced in identification with modes of reading and writing understood to be lyric, especially as these have been determined by a diffuse 'New Critical' discourse by now so thoroughly absorbed as to seem natural" (4). The emphasis on modes of *reading* is key, taking our attention away from poems that are or are not "lyric" (whether shamefully so or not) toward the imputation of the lyric voice onto texts, readers searching for and shaming it where it is found. The lyric shame *poem* then comes after and in awareness of lyric shame as a general issue. It is "a mode informed by the lyric shame situation of the late twentieth century—when twentieth-century pedagogical idealizations of a lyric 'tradition' reenter and redouble in the academy in negative form as avant-garde antilyricism" (211).

The particulars of what constitutes *lyric* shame and its generic realization in the lyric shame poem matter little to us here, but we can draw several parallels to the nostalgic shame poem. The nostalgic shame poem also comes after its shame, i.e., nostalgic shame. Such shame entails knowledge firstly that nostalgia is shameful or (more clinically) "problematic," and secondly that there are particular strategies for reading for and unearthing that problematicness. Like the lyric shame poem, it matters little whether the work is written in defense of, abashment at, or sustained critique of nostalgia's shame. The point is that it participates generally in the discourse that secures that shamefulness. When Ramanujan writes, for example, of a figure in one of his poems, that he has a "concave eye groping only / for mother and absences. Nothing / at all is family to that estrangement," he evokes a readily available (Freudian) interpretation of nostalgia, which in turn plugs easily into broader discourses of diaspora and its nostalgias. All of this happens throughout Ramanujan's oeuvre with varying degrees of overt "shame," it is true.

But the watchers are always lingering there, producing sometimes anxiety, sometimes sorrow, but always aware what the poet's nostalgia is and means in a broader post-Enlightenment and post-colonial culture.

CHAPTER 2: COUNTER-NOSTALGIAS AND THE MAKING OF MODERN INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

INTRODUCTION

Having shown, in Patke's formulation, the "negative" side of Ramanujan's poetry in the first chapter, this chapter turns to its positive side. More than that, it expands the scope of consideration widely to consider the larger translating generation to which Ramanujan belonged (albeit as an older, more distant member). The desire of this chapter is not to worry about what, if anything, is "lost" in translation. These translations are, as it were, pure plenitude. What will concern us is their role within the emerging sphere of "new," "modern," or simply postcolonial Indian poetry in English, where they help indigenize English and revise the translational aesthetics of Orientalism and late Romanticism that these poets inherit when they come on the scene in the late 1950s and 60s.

The first section inaugurates our interest in the postcolonial generation of Indian poets in English by turning to a remark made by one of its major figures, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, who expressed dismay at finding himself at a loss before the "language of skylarks and nightingales." I tie that remark to some of the broad trends in Mehrotra's generation, which I also define more explicitly.

The second section goes back to that Orientalist and Romantic phase to explore what that Keatsian phrase—"the language of skylarks and nightingales"—might have meant to Mehrotra and his peers. In other words, I will be sketching a stereotype so as to explore how that stereotype influenced postcolonial poetics. In the process, I will argue that the Orientalist translation aesthetics surrounding Sanskrit on the one hand and the late Romantic aesthetics of original Indian poetry in English on the other hand are inseparable, both during their time but

also in terms of the associations of that style when it came to sit in books before the postcolonial generation.

Section 2.3 then describes what I call the aesthetics of translingual nostalgia that the generation develops to break free of the style outlined in the previous section. I argue that they consciously reshaped the cultural memory of a particular period not in terms of the content of the memory, but in terms of style and emotion. Now medieval bhakti poetry became newly sleek, sexy, and linguistically subversive. Nostalgia for that period—specifically nostalgia for an era when language broke free of classicism and touched the hard facts of reality in order to disrupt them—allows these poets to produce a subcontinental aesthetics of English that is still influential today.

Section 2.4 then takes up a case study of Mehrotra's translation work and its relation to his original poetry in order to give some greater specificity to the account above, as well as to argue that scholars have perhaps done an injustice to the translative trend by focusing solely on bhakti poetry. Mehrotra also translates from Prakrit, and (as we will see in Chapter 3) Agha Shahid Ali also translates from Urdu. The translingual nostalgia of the postcolonial generation was subversive of Orientalist and Sanskritic aesthetics broadly; they were not only fans of the bhakti poets alone.

2.1 THE NEED FOR A NEW AESTHETICS

Until recently there was widespread consensus that "Indian poetry in English doesn't seriously begin to exist till after Independence" (Jussawalla "The New Poetry" 65). People loved repeating it: "Genuine Indian poetry in English really began in the nineteen-fifties, and the reader of today who is strictly interested in poetry can ignore, except for historical purposes, earlier versifying" (Walsh 127). Introducing an influential anthology that would help solidify the narrative, *Twelve*

Modern Indian Poets (1992), Arvind Krishna Mehrotra claimed that the poetry "written between 1825 and 1945 is truly dead" (1).[39] Of these three quotations, two are by the very poets who helped birth the new poetry that is, they claim, finally worth reading. All of them agree that Nissim Ezekiel was the man who finally gave India its own poetic voice in English, in 1952, the "*annus mirabulus*…when [he] published his first volume of poetry, called, appropriately, *A Time to Change*" (Chaudhuri Introduction 13).

Since the time when such pronouncements were common, the value terms of the narrative have shifted somewhat (now the nineteenth century gets a modicum of respect), but the basic divisions of the timeline remain the same. Ezekiel changed the game, and the 1970s is when Indian poetry in English really got going on its new, modern terms, in Bombay. Those 70s Bombay poets, whose multilingual scene Anjali Nerlekar has beautifully described in her *Bombay Modern*, crucially saw themselves as overcoming that dusty old poetry of the pre-Independence days. I will take Mehrotra as my paradigm for the moment, but I stress his inclusion in the Bombay scene described by Nerlekar—a scene that had broader echoes across India and abroad, where key features of the narrative I will describe would repeat. I will return to this claim, to give it some textual depth, but for now I focus in on Mehrotra.

Not only is Mehrotra himself a major poet within the Bombay scene, he has recently become one of the most ardent voices seeking to place it within a larger tradition of Indian poetry in English. As an editor, he has published, in addition to the aforementioned *Twelve Modern Indian Poets*, a valuable essay collection, *History of Indian Literature in English* (2003). His own essays on Indian literary history, collected in *Partial Recall* (2012), attest poignantly to

[39] More recently, Mehrotra has sought "atonement" for such broad-brush dismissals ("Toru Dutt" 114).

one of the motivations behind all this extra-poetic effort. For Mehrotra, the lack of tradition and community in the Indian English literary scene is deplorable: "If there are any productive intellectual [especially literary-critical] communities living in the scrub, whether nomadic or settled, freelancers or attached to universities, they've kept themselves well hidden from view" (*Partial* 2). He imagines a scene where poets pop up, write a few books to be published and read only by their friends, then die, leaving another poet to pop up elsewhere without so much as ever hearing the name of her predecessors—"the dead writer is now twice dead" (2). In many ways, such bleakness marks an *optimistic* turn. Written as it is well into Mehrotra's established maturity in 2012, the essay believes at least that there are good poets out there, just that nobody is hearing about them or connecting their work to the rest of the Indian literary field and its history. As you move back into the early days of the supposed rebirth of Indian poetry in English, remarks get darker and more dismissive. I quoted above from Adil Jusawalla's remarks on pre-Independence poetry, written in a 1968 issue of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature.* Although I said he saw Nissim Ezekiel as a breath of fresh air to the new poetry, the truth is that even that air was only *relatively* fresh, "[c]ompared to the loose horrors of our early Romantics" (60).

The rhetoric and attitude of the 60s and 70s often veers in the direction of Mehrotra's image of the wasteland "scrub" of Indian literature in English, particularly poetry. (That things on the ground, in the thick of on-going projects and poetic exchange could look much more vibrant is attested by Nerlekar's book, however.) These concerns were important in shaping the poetry that was produced during that era. Looking back on the time from the publication of his *Collected Poems 1969-2014*, Mehrotra comments on an "awful contradiction between the world I wanted to write about, the world of dentists and chemist shops, and the language, English, I

wanted to write in. How do you write about an uncle in a wheelchair in the language of skylarks and nightingales?" (xv-xvi). While not everyone would use those terms, the generational interest in things like dentists (Mehrotra), banks (Ramanujan), and buses (Kolatkar) is notable, as is the turn each made quite consciously from "skylarks and nightingales."[40]

My argument in this chapter concerns how a generation of poets writing at least sometimes in English but often multilingually (and nearly always translating from some other language to English) came to see English as "the language of skylarks and nightingales" and what they did to recover the earth-bound use of that language from those airy dream-creatures. It is worth, therefore making clear what I mean by "generation" at this point. I must confess I intend it somewhat fuzzily. At the definitional center I locate what Nerlekar calls, borrowing a Marathi term to name the period, the "sathottari" poets, i.e., the Bombay poets of the 1960s and 70s who published each other in short-lived "little magazines" and eventually started their own small book-publishing houses, for which they provided their own cover art (Kolatkar, being an ad man and graphic designer, produced some marvelous editions).[41] Key figures in this movement include Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004), Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (born 1947), Eunice de Souza (1940-2017), Gieve Patel (born 1940), and Dilip Chitre (1938-2009), among others. Among these writers, many became translators of, especially, non-contemporary but also non-classical poetry from the *bhasha*s or so-called "regional languages" (where "classical" here means Sanskrit, Persian, and other languages favored by early Orientalists). Most notably, these

[40] Mehrotra, in saying this, is recalling his mood at the beginning of his career. Now, he emphasizes, he sees things differently, such as the "irony" of the uncle he previously felt he "couldn't" talk about in English being himself Oxford-educated (xvi).
[41] Nerlekar names the dates of the period as "approximately 1955-1980," but the early end of this period falls outside the developments that concern me.

poets would translate works from the medieval devotional "movement" called *bhakti*.[42]

It is that link with bhakti poetry and its translation which expands my sense of the "generation" at issue out of the narrow confines of Bombay to include much of India as well as its diaspora. A. K. Ramanujan (1929-1993) thus fits the bill (despite being a bit older than the other poets, he did not begin publishing poetry until the late 1960's); so does Jayanta Mahapatra (born 1928) in Orissa and Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001) in Kashmir/Delhi/USA. These writers almost all had enormous impact on the next generation, some of whom follow similar patterns as those I will be discussing, albeit with the "meaning" of those actions changed, since the contexts for doing them have also changed. An example would be Ranjit Hoskote (born 1968), who has translated the Kashmiri mystic (and arguably bhakti) poet Lal Ded and shows influence from Agha Shahid Ali (who prominently praised Hoskote's first volume when it was released in *India Today*).

My explicit characterization of the generation therefore leaves out a number of prominent figures writing in similar circles at the same time. Most notably, Nissim Ezekiel will play little to no role in my account. As Mehrotra once commented in a moment of passionate polemic, "A hundred Indo-Anglian years, which is an eternity, should have separated Ezekiel (b. 1924) and Kolatkar (b. 1931). Tragically for us, they belong to the same generation" (*Partial* 155). I take this as a valid excuse for acknowledging the separateness of what we might call either the "translingual nostalgia" or the "counter-nostalgia" generation from even some of its seeming contemporaries. At the very least, the two groups found different solutions to the aesthetic

[42] The idea of the *bhakti* movement now has widespread purchase in the cultural imagination of South Asia, but the extent to which it was unified or even diffusely a "movement" remains a point of contention. John Stratton Hawley has written a major intellectual history of the bhakti-movement idea in his *Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement*.

problems facing them, the ones who interest us chose a more or less nostalgic route that we shall delineate.

Before detailing what their generation did to jump-start a new poetic aesthetics, however, I want to explore in a bit more detail the tradition they inherited. Why did pre-Independence poetry in English seem so "truly dead," and what even does that mean? Answering that question will require a flash survey of an admittedly under-studied century.[43] Thankfully, what matters is less the minutiae of the literary history than the over-arching story of how that body of literature came to be read and received by young would-be poets like Mehrotra.

2.2 ORIENTALIST POETRY AND ITS NEIGHBORING NOSTALGIAS

The development of Indian English poetry and its genres is inseparable from the arrival of Orientalist-inflected nostalgia for India's civilizational "golden age." Early Indian poets writing in English were, unsurprisingly, active interlocutors of Orientalist scholars and poets. Indeed, the development of Indian English poetry is inseparable from Orientalist aesthetics in general, as well as from the incipient proto-nationalisms that drew on those aesthetics, such as in the case of the so-called "Bengal Renaissance."

Consider Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831), "the one early Indian-English writer to grow up monolingual in English" and the "first to call India 'Mother'" (Dharwadker "Historical Formation" 224, 226). An enormously influential and controversial figure, Derozio is famous for the students he inspired, a group of radical anti-traditional rationalists called "Young

[43] Rosinka Chaudhuri has been leading the charge in equipping us with a better picture of those times. Her books in the field include *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project* (2002), *Freedom and Beef-Steaks: Colonial Calcutta Culture* (2012) and *The Literary Thing: History, Poetry and the Making of a Modern Literary Culture* (2014). She has also edited the tremendously useful recent Cambridge *History of Indian Poetry in English*. For a valuable anthology of primary source material, see Eunice de Souza's *Early Indian Poetry in English, An Anthology: 1829-1947*.

Bengal." His most famous literary achievement is a "seemingly dreary" 1828 sonnet titled, "To India, My Native Land." As Rosinka Chaudhuri notes, the poem is one of the few "concessions" to Independence made in the English literature curricula of India and has therefore gained considerable prominence in the immediate post-colonial cultural imagination of India's schoolchildren. The first four lines give a sense of its tenor:

> My country! in thy day of glory past
> A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,
> And worshipped as a deity thou wast.
> Where is that glory, where that reverence now?

As Chaudhuri also notes, the title came not from the poet but Francis Bradley-Birt, Derozio's 1923 anthologist (Introduction 3). The name fits the simple theme well enough, except that it retroactively specifies what precisely Derozio considered his "native land," his "country." Those are the words the poet himself used, in keeping with Romantic conventions, and their ambiguity is suggestive of alternative nationalisms prior to the specifically "Indian" (e.g.., Bengali or Hindu, terms which were not so stably separate in the early to mid-nineteenth century as they are today). With language thus inspired by the Romantics and an underlying conceit inspired by Calcutta Orientalists, the poem helps inaugurate the patriotic tropes that would be taken up, recycled, and retooled throughout the Bengal Renaissance.

Rosinka Chaudhuri has spoken of these tropes and their cousins as forming "a distinct strand of 'Orientalist' verse in the nineteenth century" within Indian writing in English (*Gentlemen Poets* 37). It is a strand that she has meticulously laid out in her book *Gentleman Poets in Colonial Bengal*. As she notes there, not only Derozio but "[e]very poet in the nineteenth century attempting to express a new-found concern with India read William Jones"

(40). His influence was all over their works—in the myths referred to and the phrases used, as well as in their penchant for extensive didactic footnotes, explaining, for example, the Latin names of local flora and referring, naturally, to the works of Sir William Jones. The power to influence was not limited to Jones, however. Derozio was an admirer of the Sanskritist H. H. Wilson, who was also working in Calcutta at the time and to whom Derozio even dedicated his second publication (31). It was in fact through Jones and Wilson that Derozio came to learn of and understand his country's "day of glory past." Chaudhuri goes so far as to say that "the depiction of the East in Derozio's poems derived *entirely* from his reading" of the Calcutta Orientalists and from Orientalist-inspired poetry from England, such as that "of Campbell, Byron or Moore" (37, emphasis added).

The point is not (only) that Derozio and his ilk were derivative (though certainly that is how a young Mehrotra would receive them). Everyone borrows from somewhere, and the British writers Derozio borrows from were certainly borrowing from India (and elsewhere in the "Orient") in turn as they elaborated their aesthetic fantasies of the exotic elsewhere. However highly unequal the dialogue, it was still a dialogue. What we must understand rather is the intellectual and aesthetic frameworks Derozio participated in, even helped create. As noted above, the question of nationalism at this point was still but dimly posed. The Calcutta Orientalists were shedding light on the ancient heritage of Sanskrit, which the British used to narrate a local history favorable to them. Meanwhile, figures like Derozio came along in ambivalent response, accepting the Orientalists' terms but seeing them from another side.

A good example of what resulted is Derozio's "The Enchantress of the Cave: A Tale," an "oriental tale" in the vein of Byron's *The Giaour* or Moore's *Lalla Rookh*, both of which Derozio quotes in epigraph. The poem takes place the night before a decisive battle between "Bramah's

[sic] children" and "[t]heir fell, invading, Moslem foes" (Derozio 130). As Chaudhuri notes, the text seems pulled in two directions simultaneously—toward the European exoticizing and sympathetic fascination with Muslim culture and toward demonizing them for their presence in South Asia (*Freedom* Chapter 2). The former would largely wane as the century passed and tastes for the exotic shift, both at home and abroad. The latter, however, remained decisive. As Chaudhuri also notes, "The Enchantress of the Cave" is thus "one of the earliest examples…of the self-conscious expression of a 'Hindu point of view' in a literary work in English" in his "Enchantress of the Cave" (*Gentlemen* 44). The innovation came at a massive cost even as it promised a boon. Part of the inspiration for the text seems to have come from Scottish poet Thomas Campbell, whose "Pleasures of Hope" likewise refers to the violent invasion of India by Muslims. In Campbell's poem, however, the conceit is used for explicit criticism of the British:

> Children of Brama! then was mercy nigh
> To wash the stain of blood's eternal dye?
> Did Peace descend, to triumph and to save,
> When free-born Britons cross'd the Indian wave?
> Ah, no! to more than Rome's ambition true,
> The Nurse of Freedom gave it not to you! (lines 553-557)

For perhaps obvious reasons of censorship, such forthrightness would not work for Derozio, so he had to avoid mention of the British entirely. Instead, he lets the "proud Mussulman" stand in for foreign dominance *in general*, tacitly implicating the British as well. He interpellates his fellow countrymen, rousing them to opposition: "O! for the spirit of the past, / Ere exiled Freedom looked her last, / On this delicious orient clime," it begins;

> O! for the heroic hearts of old

To fire the souls that now are cold

To lead them on to deeds of worth,

And raise their glory yet on earth

'Tis vain to wish—it will not be:—

But since the spark of liberty

Is quenced, that once did warmly glow,

In daring bosoms, long ago,

O! for a life-inspiring strain

To fan it to light again! (131)

In gaining a covert way to oppose domination, the poem scapegoats Muslims as foreigners to South Asia, a conflation that lives on, according to scholars like Christophe Jaffrelot, in more or less identical terms in contemporary Hindu nationalism—well after both Mughal and British rule have ceased (Jaffrelot Chapter 1). The Romantic-Orientalist verse of the mid-nineteenth century thus comes not only with predictable aesthetics but also with predictable identity politics. The two, in fact, are intertwined.

The specific genre of "Orientalist verse" to which Derozio contributes ends, Chaudhuri tells us, by 1875 (at least as a dominant aesthetic trend; more directly imitative verse continued sporadically). The genre's influence, however, lives on in a number of ways that eventually shape the post-Independence generation of poets. One part of this generic afterlife lies in the fact that people did not stop reading the earlier Orientalist verse just because it fell out of fashion. New poetic torch-bearers such as Sarojini Naidu and Rabindranath Tagore certainly continued to. Tagore's auto-translations are particularly telling. When he translated his "Where the mind is without fear," for example, Tagore echoes almost verbatim certain phrases and images of the

earlier Madhusudan's (obviously Anglophilic) "heavenly Britain," albeit now with the references turned, as Chaudhuri points out, towards India (*Gentlemen* 103). Furthermore, as Mahasweta Sengupta has famously argued, Tagore *in general* orientalized himself in translation, particularly the work that helped earn him his Nobel prize, *Gitanjali*. Thanks to such maneuvers, his work slid right into "the stereotypical role that was familiar to the colonizer, a voice that not only spoke of the peace and tranquillity of a distant world, but also offered an escape from the materialism of the contemporary Western world" (Sengupta 58). Aside from the mystical posturing Sengupta attributes to these translations, she also notes the quite obvious Romantic tinge to the language. It is the stuff, one might say, of nightingales and skylarks.

An additional afterlife of Orientalist verse would be in Orientalist translations, in particular, translations of Sanskrit. To this day, Sanskrit translation remains very conservative, with many a phrase still carrying the scent of the nineteenth century. "Creepers" appear where one would expect vines; (erotic) horripilation where one would hope at least for goosebumps. Regardless of which translations from Sanskrit Mehrotra and his generation were exposed to, they would almost certainly have shared the orientalizing techniques of Jones and Tagore. The impact of this fact—that "Indian tradition" (by which was meant Sanskrit tradition, by which was meant especially Brahminical Sanskrit tradition) was mediated through an initial reception in English—*on the idea and aesthetics of English* in India has so far received too little attention by scholars. The Derozian genre of Orientalist verse already illustrated one facet of this influence, i.e., the shaping of specific aesthetic tendencies in English by Sanskrit and Persian translations. But Sanskrit literature's continued pressure on English via the on-going reception of works in translation carries its own force, hardly worth dismissing.

The final way in which Orientalist verse continued to impact later expectations of Indian

poetry in English is perhaps the simplest. We have already seen that readers in the immediate aftermath of Independence (and for some time afterward) tended to lump the entire nineteenth century into one ball of tired "Romantic" aesthetics. Indeed, their idea of the nineteenth century in poetry extended all the way to 1947, as it still does in, e.g., Eunice de Souza's recent (and excellent) anthology of "early Indian poetry in English."

Accordingly, by the time Mehrotra bemoans the stifling predictability of English as "the language of skylarks and nightingales," he is not just talking about Keats. He is talking about an entire subcontinental aesthetics and politics that ties to Keats. That knot of associations includes a variety of Orientalist stereotypes, a particular flavor of (often identitarian) nationalism, a sense of proximity not only to the colonizer but also to Brahminical authority and Sanskrit traditionalism, as well as the usual clichés about nineteenth-century literature—with its inverted syntax and muddy thought shot through with thees and thous. It is also worth pointing out that some of Mehrotra's reaction against the Romantic-Orientalist aesthetics of the past concerned the usual shame of colonial belatedness. He marks his disappointment, for example, in Sarojini Naidu on the first page of his introduction to *Twelve Modern Indian Poets.* Naidu had, it seemed, once hosted Ezra Pound at her London home, introducing him to Mrs. Mary Fenollosa, a woman who would eventually give him her husband's literary remains, thereby lighting one of the major modernist fuses, which would culminate in Pound's (in)famous translations from Chinese. Despite this near-encounter with the avant garde, though, Naidu went on writing the late-Romantic verse that so disappointed the young Mehrotra (and fascinates him now that he is older).

With all of this background laid out before us, we can see the danger now that would lie in assuming that Mehrotra and company were simply indulging in a school-boyish sense of

rebellion against their dreary lessons in English poetry. Even were we to push that claim politically and note, as Peter D. McDonald does, that school training at that time meant "colonial" training, it would hardly suffice (275).[44] Mehrotra and his poetic allies were not, by and large, "writing back," as the postcolonial slogan has it.[45] Their audience and efforts were much more local. That is one of the main differences between Indian poetry in English and its prose cousins. The former has remained much more firmly embedded in local coterie-like scenes, tied intimately across linguistic lines through multilingual writing and passionate translation. In any case, as two recent monographs on Arun Kolatkar suggest, a more prominent foil for his generation is not the imperialist but the linguistic chauvinist or the militant (Hindu) nationalist.[46]

2.3 TRANSLINGUAL NOSTALGIAS

As we saw in the first chapter, A.K. Ramanujan felt that his future needed a new, less Sanskritic past. His co-generationists seem, in large part, to have agreed. To that consensus, I want to add that, for most of that generation, Sanskrit and a particular style of English were thoroughly intertwined. To move past Sanskrit was also to move past that English. The project these poets found before them thus required that they find, in English, a new local (and hence non-English) past that somehow also breaks free of what they feel to be the (most obvious, colonially

[44] Strictly speaking, since Mehrotra was born in independent India, the training would only have been colonial in legacy, not a colonial education *per se*.

[45] For the origins of that term, now ubiquitous, see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. I should stress that when I say that they did not have "the international audience" necessary, I mean a kind of audience or an aspiration toward it. They did indeed connect internationally, but not in the way that would allow for writing back *per se*.

[46] See Nerlekar's *Bombay Modern* and Zecchini's *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism,* both of which stress the rise of Marathi nationalism that led, e.g., to the changing of the name Bombay to Mumbai. Both authors continued to use the earlier, English name even after the change (when writing in English, that is).

inherited) past of English itself. That is no easy task.

In practice, what that most often entailed was translating medieval devotional (bhakti) poetry into an Americanizing (and often vulgar) register of English, while simultaneously blurring the lines between translation and original writing. These poets' relationship to such translation work was not, however, cynical; they did not set out, knowing nothing of what lay out there, to *find* a subversive non-Sanskritic past and then translate willfully into the opposite of what Orientalist translation aesthetics would dictate. They simply read *in the original* through a lens that knew this American English. The appeal of the bhakti poets was in large part that they felt like people facing the same problem—trying to find immediacy in the vernacular when the only available literary language was classical. In the process of discovering this and conveying it into English, Mehrotra's generation evinced a kind of nostalgia for what they saw as earlier moments of vital, disruptive language. They rejected one nostalgia and embraced another. They were, I will say, counter-nostalgic.

Before proceeding further we need a better sense of what bhakti is. As with most interesting questions, the answer is far from simple. Here, however, is how John Stratton Hawley introduces it in his engaging intellectual history, *A Storm of Songs*,

> "Bhakti," as usually translated, is devotion, but if that word connotes something entirely private and quiet, we are in need of other words. Bhakti is heart religion, sometimes cool and quiescent but sometimes hot—the religion of participation, community, enthusiasm, song, and often of personal challenge, the sort of thing that coursed through the Protestant Great Awakenings in the history of the United States. It evokes the idea of a widely shared religiosity for which institutional superstructures weren't all that relevant, and which, once activated, could be

> historically contagious—a glorious disease of the collective heart. It implied direct divine encounter, experienced in the lives of individual people. These people, moved by that encounter, turn to poetry, which is the natural vehicle of bhakti, and poetry expresses itself just as naturally in song. There is a whole galaxy of bhakti poets who have been moved to song in the course of Indian history, and their songs are still sung today, everywhere across the subcontinent and in all its major languages.…They come from both sexes and all social stations. They are understood to be the voice of the people's religion, broadly, and they are held up to have had a distinctive history. (2)

If there is a lot there, it is because the concept is so resonant. I call it a concept because, as Hawley stresses, it is one. The "idea of the bhakti movement coalesces" only in the twentieth century (2). Hence the slightly evasive phrasing throughout Hawley's description. Bhakti "evokes," "implie[s]," is "understood," and "held up" as these things at least as much as it "is" any of them, or rather the "is" and the "as" coincide in the bhakti idea as it calls into being a powerful image that only a quibbler could fail to call real.

For different groups, however, the movement means quite distinct things. For some, it displays a kind of nationalist *Geist*, pan-Indian cultural phenomenon that it is. For others, it reveals the essence underlying the various named religions of the world. It can even mean opposing things to opposing groups. Much hinges on whether you take as your paradigm case, say, Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*, an orthodox retelling of the classical *Rāmāyaṇa*, as your paradigm case, or whether you prefer the fieriest poems by Ravidās or Kabīr. Much also depends on who and where you are when you pick your paradigm case. For a Brahmin like Rabindranath Tagore, as Hawley notes, "bhakti was liberation—a genre of performed self-knowledge that

enabled [him] to situate [himself] in the broader social and political fabric" in progressive new ways (7). Bhakti would be a different kind of liberation for a low caste woman. And in its modern guise as desh-bhakti (patriotism or, a bit more literally, homeland-devotion), it may not warrant the liberatory epithet at all. We need, then, a vocabulary for thinking of bhakti not in the singular—as a movement or an idea—but rather, as Christian Novetzki suggests in his study of the bhakti saint Namdev, "an ongoing effort to construct publics of belief [or, say, poetry], maintained through intricate systems of memory" (xi). In our case, however, memory will mean primarily translation. The issue is not what bhakti poets mean in the original, nor what they mean for the culture at large, but what memory is proposed by the translations of this new generation of poets.

What does it mean, then, that so many Indian poets in English turned to bhakti poetry for inspiration, imitation, and translation? Part of their motivation was undoubtedly the same, broadly speaking, as Tagore's—a freeing rebellion against what seemed the most regressive and pernicious aspects of the culture. For the most part, however, these poets were and are not activists, except in displays of solidarity and other rather attenuated ways. Their bhakti poetry meant something else. For them, the essence of the tradition was "formal," aesthetic (Nerlekar 116). Or maybe it would be better to say that they saw the form and aesthetic of bhakti as the real site of its subversiveness and social power.

What, then, is the form or aesthetic of a bhakti poem? It may be tempting to answer by describing the "originals," but it is not obvious how that should be done. The originals themselves can seem to change whether you are reading them from the perspective of personal devotion, social upheaval, or otherwise. What we are trying to figure out is precisely what it means to read them for their form. It seems we have found a vicious circle. How can we read the

texts “for” something before we have specified what that is? The solution is to look at the translations, where we find the very distinctive “alchemy of the colloquial” that Nerlekar has identified. As many have noted, it blends Beat influences with the diction of American gangster films and the rhythm of the blues. Here is Arun Kolatkar translating Janabai:

> god my darling
> do me a favor and kill my mother-in-law
>
> i will feel lonely when she is gone
> but you will be a good god won’t you
> and kill my father-in-law
>
> i will be glad when he is gone
> but you will be a good god won’t you
> and kill my sister-in-law
>
> i will be free when she is gone
> i will pick up my begging bow
> and be on my way
>
> let them drop dead says jani
> then we will be left alone
> just you and me (301)

The lower-case letters and lack of punctuation show the influence of e. e. cummings clearly

enough. Nonetheless, the poem feels immediate, not filtered through an American influence. The American style of speech in general, perhaps less obvious here than elsewhere, allows Kolatkar and others to present the starkest alternative to British English they have, without sounding defensive or nativist. (Within Indian poetry in English, the use of specifically *Indian* English is less common than in novelistic prose, and often comes with humor rather than any sincere sense that such English is more authentic—an obvious example would be Nissim Ezekiel's "Very Indian Poem in English.") As Nerlekar observes, the *sathotthari* poets sought "a new way of knowing the urban space—not nativist, not internationalist, not global, not national" (3). So how does borrowing American poetic stylings (from cummings), a bluesy three-line stanza, and a generally American street vocabulary help avoid internationalism and globalism? Partly by speaking to a local audience. This translation, like most of Kolatkar's work in English, remained unpublished until he knew he would die soon and handed over his work for editing and publication by Mehrotra. Until then it was only shared with friends, and it retains that feeling of intimacy, of not needing to explain itself.

What all this is in service of, within a broader culture of poetry, is, according to Nerlekar, "the revival of linguistic realism through the frank language and imagery of the everyday practices used by the saint-poets" (*Bombay Modern* 116). For these poets, "linguistic realism" was something lost to the past, perhaps lost to English as well, but there in bhakti and other subversive vernacular poets. They had a whole lineage that they built up through translation, which they explicitly contrasted with the lineage (notably not in translation) they were trying to erase or move past; the Tagore-Aurobindo-Naidu lineage was to be displaced by "Kapilar, Paranar, Bassavanna, Allama Prabhu, Kabir, Tukaram, Nirala, [and] Faiz" (Mehrotra Introduction 2). It hardly takes a sustained look at that list to realize how dominated it is by

bhakti poets. The list is, in fact, a list of major translations by the postcolonial generation of poets in English. Kapilar, Paranar, Bassavanna, and Allama Prabhu were translated by Ramanuan. Kabir and Nirala were translated by Mehrotra. Tukaram was translated by Kolatkar and Dilip Chitre. Faiz was also translated by Agha Shahid Ali. Only the modern Hindi poet Nirala (1896-1961) falls into the non-canonical among these translations, included as his poems are only in book-form within Mehrotra's *Collected Poems*. (I mean that the translations are non-canonical; the originals are of course canonical in Hindi.)

One of the notable achievements of this generation's translation efforts is the more or less complete assimilation of the bhakti movement and its poets to an image of rebelliousness, anti-Brahminical agitation, and fresh subversiveness among its readers. This is so much so that Bruce King, in a recent review, can claim that to invoke Sanskrit in one's writing is to pander to parochial chauvinism and Brahmanism whereas to translate bhakti poets is to get a charge of subversion ("From the Sublime"). Likewise, recent Indian novels in English have drawn on the clash between bhakti and Sanskrit (or at least communalism) played out in the translations we have been discussing. Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege*, for example, is about the clash between a history professor (writing on Basavanna) and Hindu fundamentalists who wish him silenced. The novel is explicitly inspired by Ramanujan's translations, quoting them liberally throughout and expressing, in the Acknowledgments, gratitude to Ramanujan's book for having introduced Basavanna to her (although she notes she has learned much from other books on Basavanna too). Likewise, M. G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* likewise puts the poetry and songs of bhakti at the narrative and moral center of novel about the ravages of communalism.

That is not at all the only available interpretation of the bhakti movement. Writers in Sanskrit, for example, have no problem assimilating Kolatkar's and Chitre's beloved Tukaram to

"Sanskritic" and "Brahminical" values (see, e.g., Kṣamā Rao's verse biography). And the bhakti movement remains central (as the *bhakti āndolan*) to Hindi education and the nationalist vision it attempts to instill (Hawley 37). Indian nationalism in general is quite fond of the bhakti movement, despite King's image of the two as conflictual. The "connections between languages and periods, between religious communities both Muslim and Hindu, and between sacred registers and secular—all served to enhance the value of bhakti as a resource in the cause of national integration, and to suggest that it had been doing that work for centuries (Hawley 19). For some nationalists (wishing to oppose the capacious nation to the more limiting Brahmanism) the vernacular, local aspects of bhakti were quite appealing.

In the context of her argument about the *sathottari* movement, Nerlekar is quite aware of these facts (114). And as Hawley points out, the eminent scholar of the long history of Sanskrit-vernacular relationships, Sheldon Pollock, "is often at pains to show how the religious register has been over-emphasized in earlier treatments of vernacularization, and he does not fail to point out that even when the vernacular option was there, some bhakti authors continued to choose Sanskrit as their medium" (9). Still, these poets have done a good job of selling the image. Perhaps more important than their role in shaping cultural memory of the bhakti period (which is something admittedly that scholars and activists have also taken part in) is the sense of style and energy associated with the movement, that is something worth being attached to, yearning for, and getting excited about recreating. The inspiration to keep translating these poets attests to some of that energy, as does new novelistic interest in them.

As we will see in the next section, however, it is not only the bhakti poets who mattered to this generation. As Ramanujan's classical Tamil and Mehrotra's Prakrit translations suggest, "Sanskrit" as a dominating monolith could be countered in many ways. What is important is that

in each case, the language being translated from be imagined as immediate, direct, and "vernacular"—an image that allowed for the seizing and creating of a new English that, the poets hope, will likewise contain those values, allowing for the subversiveness that they attach to the poems they are translating, with their iconoclasm, impropriety, and passion.

I hope at this point that my argument is gaining enough force that I can claim that "nostalgia" and its attachments do a better job of accounting for these translations than does the shame and defensiveness about being insufficiently Indian that critics such as Akshaya Kumar attribute to the whole project. But it may be useful to turn to a closer reading of some of the texts in order to see in greater detail what I mean.

2.4 CASE STUDY: MEHROTRA'S TRANSLATIONS

Mehrotra has produced two book-length works of translation. One is of the songs of the medieval North-Indian bhakti saint, Kabir. The other is an anthology of short poems, called *gāthā*-s, of largely erotic subject matter written in Mahārāṣṭrī Prakrit, the ostensibly vernacular but really quite codified and classical language that followed Sanskrit. The anthology, called the *Gāthāsattasaï* (*The Seven Hundred Gāthā-s*), is "by most accounts the oldest extant anthology of poetry from South Asia, containing our very earliest examples of secular verse" (Selby 81). Both choices, the iconoclastic Kabir and the early secular anthology, are revealing, as are the choices he made in selecting particular poems to choose from each. This section will explore examples from each set of translations to clarify some of what is revealed.

In Mehrotra's Kabīr translations, there are willful anachronisms, epigraphs that belong to wholly other contexts, and a general irreverence that bleeds the line between then and now. A poem that opens with a Leadbelly quote, "It take a man that have the blues so to sing the blues," opens in a way that makes that quote seem not just culturally and historically out of place, but

topically too:

> O pundit, your hairsplitting's
> So much bullshit. I'm surprised
> You still get away with it.
>
> I parroting the name
> of Rama brought salvation,
> Then saying *sugarcane*
> Should sweet the mouth.

A short while later, the poem ends, "You'll be delivered to Deathville" (26). What are we to make of these slaps in the face of translational propriety, of making a "poet-saint" who lived, as Mehrotra puts it in the introduction, a "half millennium" ago, talk like a street-wise smart-ass with a penchant for intentional cheesiness (vii)?

As Mehrotra points out in the introduction, he is doing nothing new. The "Kabir corpus" is not a fixed entity, and various poems are added to it through today. "Seen in this way," Mehrotra says, "the *Songs of Kabir* is both a work of translation based on the best available critical editions and…a further elaboration of the Kabir corpus" (xxxii). He gives a great example to justify his practice:

> A Kabir song recorded in Rajasthan in the mid-1990s compares the body to an *anjan* (engine), the soul to a passenger, who, his *taim* (time) on earth being short, is advised not to lose his *tikat* (ticket). One *lain* (line) will take the passenger to Immortal City; the other to the City of Death. When asked how Kabir could be familiar with the railways, to say nothing of English words like "engine," "time,"

"ticket," and "line," the singer, Bhikaramji Sharma, looked "most hurt" and replied that Kabir, being a seer, knew everything. (xxxi-xxxii)

The attitude is hardly unique to Kabir, or indeed to Mehrotra. Much of the appeal of the bhakti poets for this generation lie in how fluid the corpuses were and how open they were to fresh intervention. In an unfinished work called "Making Love to a Poem," Kolatkar speaks to his favorite poet to translate, Tukaram:

I'm not going to pan off your poems as mine

Salo Malo tried that

Salo Malo tried to pass off your poems as his

that didn't work

I'll try to pass of mine as yours

I'll create such confusion

that nobody can be sure about what you wrote and what I did (353)

This line-blurring is a commonplace among the poets of translingual nostalgia. And we can gain some sense of what their nostalgia is for by seeing the directness, the freedom, and the casualness of all of these poems. Mehrotra's Kabir voices any fed-up outsider from any generation, but he is not timeless. A corpse "smelling of aftershave / And deodorants" is hardly timeless (72).

Let us turn now to Mehrotra's foray into Prakrit poetry. Before beginning a discussion of the translation itself, it is worth noting that Mehrotra was introduced to the *Gāthāsattasaï* by

Kolatkar, reminding us again how interconnected and in dialogue these poets nostalgias are. Unlike with Kabīr, the Prakrit poetry tradition can be said safely to be well and truly dead. Even by the time Sanskrit writers began commenting on the text, which they did at great length beginning several hundred years after its compilation, it seems they may already have been working on a confusing set of texts that no longer fit the model of any still-living genres.[47] The anthology is associated with the reign of Hala, who lived in the first century CE, but the ascription is uncertain, the manuscript history is complex, and the anthology in any case contained previously written poems.

Mehrotra says of the anthology itself and of his translation:

> The *Gāthāsaptaśatī* [he uses the Sanskrit title] speaks the minute you open it, and as its translator I felt that at times I did little more than repeat in another language what it said. This indicates something about the communicability of the poems, rather than about any method of translation.The script of their images is common to the race and as old: cupped hands, a pregnant woman, a man staring. Like international signs that are understood everywhere, they hardly seem to need translators. (Translator's Note *x*)

It is, of course, a gross distortion of reality, or a playful refusal of it. Predictably, his translations exhibit a wide range of relationships to their originals (which in this edition are printed alongside their translations for anyone daring enough to try to parse the Prakrit without so much as the usual Sanskrit *chāyā*, or shadow-translation that usually accompanies the text). That alone does not disqualify his claim. But even in translation, they remain often quite puzzling works—

[47] Martha Ann Selby has written an article, "Desire for Meaning: Providing Contexts for Prakrit Gathas," on precisely this topic.

immediate in some ways and impossible in others. As I mentioned above, Sanskrit literary theorists found them a source of endless fascination and some difficulty themselves. Nonetheless, Mehrotra's claim does hint at his reasons for choosing this work and for a sense of what he hoped his translations would do. As with Kabīr, he wants to break free of classicism, stuffiness, and aesthetic hierarchy in favor of immediacy and vibrancy.

Consider poem 396:

In whispers,
  Like two seditionists,
A traveller
  To his companion:
'S-s-sh! The mango's
  F-l-o-r-e-s-c-e-n-t.'

The immediacy of the poem is clear enough, as is the typographical experimentation that obviously betrays the claim to be merely "repeating in another language" the original that sits right above it on the page, looking like this:

राअ-विरुद्धं व कहं पहिओ पहिअस्स साहइ ससङ्कं।

जत्तो अम्वाण दलं तत्तो दर-णिग्गअं किं पि ।।

But what the poem means is another matter entirely. It is hardly the stuff of international signage. Granting that there is no such thing as simply repeating in another language, a much closer effort to follow the words of the original might read along these lines: "As if speaking against the king, traveller says to traveller, anxiously: / where there is a mango leaf, there must be something else." The distance from Mehrotra's translation is glaring. Where Mehrotra has no verb in the

first half, my translation follows the Prakrit and admits that the traveller "says" (sāhaï) the second line. But that second line is where the real changes are. There is no shushing in the original, no typographical cleverness, and a much more syntactically elaborate sentence culminating in an ambiguous "something." Upon closer inspection, however, one sees some of the cleverness of Mehrotra's handiwork. The shushing seems to want to echo semantically what the second half of the first line does phonetically. Transliterated, it reads: pathikassa sāhaï sasaṅkaṃ (says to the traveller anxiously). Four sibilant s's give at least "whispers" some justification, if not the "S-s-sh!" For that matter, Mehrotra's own translation has its share of hissing: whi*s*per*s*…*s*edi*t*i*s*t*s*.

A reader versed in the tradition is "supposed" to know that what lies behind the leaf is a flower-bud, the sign of spring being sprung. Mehrotra's "f-l-o-r-e-s-c-e-n-t" is thus intended to skip right to that insight (although I must confess, I had never seen that word before and mistook it initially for fluorescent). In an endnote, Mehrotra does not tell us this, but cryptically observes, "An instance of gallows humour of homebound travellers; for the woman's response to the mango buds, see Poem 499" (91). That poem reads,

> How am I? Can't you see?
>
> Evil crowns the prodigious
>
> Mango in the yard.

Aside from the fact that this may or may not answer our questions, we notice immediately how different this poem looks on the page than the first, despite seeming more or less identical in Prakrit (where the meters are indeed the same). More than the first translation at least, this gets close to the talkiness of the original (although "evil crowns the prodigious mango" hardly qualifies as that).

Assuming that the reader catches that "mango" here means mango tree, and from there follows all the clues that Mehrotra gives, she is left with two poems, one with two traveling men pointing out anxiously a mango bud and another with a woman complaining about a mango bud in her yard. Maybe this is enough to suggest to her that she is dealing with a husband and a wife (typologically, that is—the poems are not so individuated as to specify one husband over another), and that each is dreading their imminent reunion after spending the winter apart while the husband was away on business. I suspect no reader without the Prakrit original would get all that, even with a general familiarity with the culture, but it is nonetheless conceivable.

What though can this tell us about Mehrotra's desire to translate these poems? A few observations present themselves. First, the coy quasi-didacticism of the endnotes seems a parody of more scholarly translations, such as were popularized by Jones, the early Orientalists, and the early Indian poets in English who joined them in the vogue. Second, Mehrotra cares about something other than the precise cultural embeddedness of texts, exactly what and how they mean. If anything, he seems to revel in the semi-obscurity of the poems—that they seem so obviously to mean something fairly simple and yet they remain just out of reach. Third, the translations cannot hide their modernism. "Evil crowns the prodigious mango" could be a line from Baudelaire, and we have already twice noted the typographical experiments. Finally, if/when the meaning is discerned, the sassiness of it (in a book that claims in its subtitle to contain "love poems") is a swift, rejuvenating kick to the cliché about whatever Oriental love poetry is supposed to look like. Finally the translations are tight and tense, nary a wasted word, like any "good" English poem.

A reader who has some access to the Prakrit can object all day to these choices. Take that last observation, for example, about how well the poems conform to expectations of syntactic

and verbal density in English poetry. Both originals refuse to name the ominous sign they point to (the mango bud). Both call it "something." The ordinariness of such words is something Mehrotra seems unwilling to confront. Take another example, poem 705:

Village-born,
  Among rustics raised,
To towns unused
  To city-men attractive:
I am what I am.[48]

Aside from "to," "I," and "am," this poem repeats no words. The original, however, is far more repetitive. Here is a paraphrase that tries to preserve that: "I am village-raised, I live in a village, I don't know city ways / I steal city-women's husbands, I am what I am." (The pronouns are all added in translation, but the verb-endings certainly repeat—as does the full-sentence, unvaryingly standard syntax.) Here in particular Mehrotra's diversifying the vocabulary feels like a betrayal of the original, where the woman feels so comfortable in her own straightforwardness.

One might also object to the touches of the surreal (Mehrotra cut his poetic teeth on French Surrealism) that sparkle in our ignorance of the meaning of evil in the mango crown or the magic of florescence. They give a false sense of a different kind of immediacy than the originals have, now an immediacy felt in the unconscious where before it was in plainspokenness. From a feminist standpoint, there may also be some misfortune in the fact that "against the king" (i.e., in fact, against the wife) gets translated simply as seditious, and that "I steal [or attract] the husbands of city-women" gets translated only as "to city-men attractive." On

[48] gāmāruha mhi, gāme vasāmi, ṇaaraṭṭhiïṃ ṇa āṇāmi / nāariāṇaṃ païno haremi, ja homi sa homi.

the other hand, Mehrotra calls it "essentially a woman's book, a compendium of her gestures, utterances and silences…[with] only one side of the story," when we have already seen that it also notes male voices (xi).

These objections are valid as far as they go, but they do not necessarily go where they ought. Or rather, they mislead us if we only follow where they lead. For the project of counter-nostalgia that Mehrotra is here pursuing is not one of fidelity to those goals. He is offering a past literature worth being nostalgic for, meaning (apparently) one that is consciously modernist where previous (i.e., Sanskrit) pasts had been (and remain) stifling. His choices for translation are striking in their rebuke to both classical and classicist decorum: "Ass-sniffer one day / And a slink the next / Who taught the cur-dog / His ways, brother-in-law?" (Poem 688) or "Lovers' separation / makes what once / was pleasure / seem like vomit" (Poem 670). And as a phrase like "ass-sniffer" might invite the question of precise levels of propriety and sensibility in two cultures, Mehrotra breezes past those questions as irrelevant. This is what his generation gets out of the language of the bhakti poets and of the Prakrit poets.

It is important to note that the translation initially came out from a local Indian publisher (the illustrious Ravi Dayal in 1991) and only seventeen years later came out internationally through Penguin in 2008. It was, therefore, not intended as anything like a scholarly edition (Mehrotra used various cribs and crutches to make sense of an original which he had no access to when he first started), nor as an introduction the *Gāthā*s for foreigners. It was for his friends, fellow poets, and others in the larger "scene" that would appreciate a sense of this growing counter-nostalgic past that they were collectively building and out of which they were re-fashioning their own language and poetry.

In particular, the insistence on the present tense throughout the translations feels forceful

and important. That is in part a feature of this genre of poetry, but Mehrotra's translations highlight it with the compression that cuts verbs like "say" and replaces them with colons, or opens space between letters in f-l-o-r-e-s-c-e-n-t as if to capture the intimacy of hearing a secret between children (spelling out the word for privacy or out of fear that speaking it makes it so), or (to take the typography in different direction) as if it to shatter the moment in a kind of stretching stillness, where the word stretches out in meaning to occupy the whole world. The present tense, the "now," as Nerlekar has shown, is a persistent obsession of the *sathottari* generation, focused as it is on ephemera, particularly trash (41).

For Nerlekar, the focus on ephemera, the now, and, in the case of Kolatkar, the butterfly—which she considers his master trope (182)—is a sign of nostalgia rejected. In some ways, it obviously is that. But ephemerality is precisely the stuff of nostalgia. And nostalgia cares far more about trash than might be immediately apparent. We need only recall the nostalgic obsession with obsolete technology, all the throw-away stuff of childhood, etc. And, crucially, Kolatkar knows this and knows it as nostalgia, as we see in "The Rat-Poison Man's Lunch Hour." That poem features a rather odd encounter between a pest control advertisement and an old restaurant wall. It's exactly the kind of strikingly vivified ephemera for which the poet is known—stuff ordinarily relegated to backgrounds and inattention. While the titular "Rat-Poison Man" goes about his lunch, we hear bits of the starkly different worldviews held by each of the two objects. The poster, usually carried by the Rat-Poison Man to proclaim his services, looks with disdain at everything around him. It is all so much filth to nurture the poster's rodent enemies. The wall, by contrast, is full of memories of old patrons, past businesses, and neighborhood gossip. Overhearing these memories, the poster can only appreciate one: "an obscure poet munching on Welsh rabbit /and thinking of rats dying in a wet barrel."

That's the only bit the poster understands,

dismissing everything else

as so much bullshit mousse and sentimental custard.

It even suspects that the wall,

spongy with nostalgia,

may actually have a soft spot for rats. (164-165)

Here we see again the counter-nostalgic strain against propriety (cf. Ramanujan's "pissing" sadhu, Mehrotra's Prakrit "ass-sniffer," and Shahid's "fuck[ing] the sexless angels"), but it comes also with, literally, a "soft spot" for nostalgia. It turns out that counter-nostalgic offensiveness may entail, in part, a nostalgic look back on the forms of dirtiness we have lost to the past and a sense of the stifling purity of the present, or at least one way of seeing it.

CHAPTER 3: FORM, AFFECT, ETHICS

INTRODUCTION

Nostalgia drives the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali from the start. Titling one of his books *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, he practically demands to be read through the various lenses of his defining mood. The migrant nostalgia of "A Butcher," the postcolonial nostalgia of "Dacca Gauzes," and the exoticizing nostalgia of "Crucifixion" offer only the meagre beginnings of a rich and varied list of nostalgia's intrusions. Any study of nostalgic art emerging from India in the years since its Independence has to reckon with this body of work. But the very ubiquity of his nostalgia threatens to shrink Shahid to a single word, or worse, a single definition of that word. It is tempting to acknowledge his nostalgia and let that be that. But Shahid's nostalgia is restless and does not lend itself to summing up in trite definitions.

This chapter seizes on that fact to introduce nostalgia as a critical problem. Tracing a broad narrative arc across Shahid's career, I explore its two major trajectories: toward formalism and ethical/political concern. I argue that these developments are not coincidental and that when read through the lens of nostalgia, they illustrate much about the formal possibilities of literary nostalgia as well as the specific affective relationship it assumes between reader and text—a relationship of which epistemically-concerned cultural-studies approaches fail to give a robust account.

I begin this chapter with a relatively early work, "Postcard from Kashmir" (1987), which provides an initial test-case against which to read prevailing accounts of literary nostalgia in general and Shahid's in particular. Having established that each account fails to address significant facets of the poem, I develop my own reading that highlights the poem's affective dimensions. In doing so, I draw on two theoretical resources: first, Steven Galt Crowell's

phenomenology of nostalgia; and second, the "aesthetics of the affects" developed by Charles Altieri to highlight Shahid's distinct engagement with non-narrative *feeling* over and against the more traditionally narrative *emotion*. Leaving emotion behind forces us to abandon belief-centric accounts of nostalgia and lays the groundwork for a different kind of attention to nostalgic self-production.

The following section (3.2) takes up "A Butcher," another poem from the same volume, to specifically locate nostalgia as an experience that happens in particular places and times, not just as some vague condition that floats around constantly in the background of our lives. Fleshing out the phenomenological terminology and philosophy that the first section introduces, this section focuses on the ambiguity of nostalgic objects and how best to characterize them.

Because "Postcard from Kashmir" and "A Butcher" are such brief, personal poems, they open a broad set of questions about sustaining nostalgic feeling across longer works and thereby engaging with more sophisticated and complex experiences of world than are entailed in a sparse lyric, particularly as Shahid turns away from specific-object nostalgias to more generalized sentiments. Turning to "A Nostalgist's Map of America" (1991), Section 3.3 addresses those questions by exploring the generic features that enable Shahid's nostalgic poetry and the formal experiments to which they give rise. "A Nostalgist's Map of America" also introduces what I argue is the ethical thrust of Shahid's poetry, namely the iterative, experimental search for a poetic form that enables a satisfying affective self-other relationship which the poet can affirm existentially as ethical. Shahid calls this relationship "fidelity."

Having introduced fidelity, "A Nostalgist's Map of America" leaves many unanswered questions about its precise nature. Rather than immediately take on those questions at their most general and abstract, I turn first to the narrower question of how he uses the term with respect to

his translation work. Translation appears in his oeuvre as both act and figure, often in complex mutual implication. I look in Section 3.4 at one such instance, "Summers of Translation" (2000), a poem about the experience of translating Faiz Ahmed Faiz's "Memory" from the Urdu. I argue that Shahid's notion of fidelity differs from most traditional, "instrumental" accounts of translation (a term I borrow from Lawrence Venuti). His is a nostalgic-affective fidelity that is less concerned with semantic correspondence than responsibility, conceived as the capacity to respond both to the poem and to the position it holds in one's world. I argue that Shahid's concept of fidelity thus provides a useful intervention in a translation theory dominated by epistemic concerns.

Able then to return to fidelity as a broad pursuit in Shahid's poetry, Section 3.5 positions that project amid two opposing accounts of how a text can function ethically. The first sees texts as a form of exercise that inculcates and gives shape to certain modes of being. This line of thought borrows from Pierre Hadot's notion of "spiritual exercises." The second account of literary ethics extends from Charles Altieri's Kantian take on texts as proposing new affective, ethical, or cognitive paradigms, rather than fitting into any pre-existing molds. My argument suggests that Shahid engages in a mixture of the two, but does so in a way that alters each slightly.

This chapter's sixth section examines Shahid's non-poetic writing on form and formalism as well as examples of his use of it to better understand what it means for him to say that his "increasingly radical" ethics and politics entail a commitment to "form for form's sake." Specifically, I look at what Shahid calls the "demand" of an opening phrase the only appropriate response to which is to produce the work itself. My contention is that this demand is a form of nostalgic attention that seeks a return of the phrase's form through further writing.

The Section 3.7 turns from the previous section's broad discussion of form as such to a more detailed look at one particular form that is very important for Shahid, the ghazal. In this case study, I argue among other things that the aesthetics of return embodied in Shahid's ghazals marks a culmination of one aspect of Shahid's nostalgia (a formal or generic mode of feeling) while containing and subverting the other (a pained passion). I use this distinction to highlight a difference that many nostalgia theorists fail to notice between repetitive emotional experience (such as nostalgically returning to a favorite song) and a specific, emotional form of longing (that a particular song might try to express). At the same time, it establishes a firmer connection between the exercise/exemplification ethical distinction of Section 3.4 and the formal concerns of Section 3.6.

3.1 AFFECTIVE NEGOTIATIONS

"Postcard from Kashmir" provides a neat introduction to Shahid's nostalgia, not only because it is among his earliest and most oft-quoted poems but more importantly because it offers a relatively straightforward expression of nostalgia *as an emotion*. That is to say, the affect driving the poem leads to the formation of a definite "attitude" toward its object, an attitude which in turn "establish[es] a particular cause and so situate[s] the agent [here, the speaker] within a narrative and generate[s] some kind of action or identification" (Altieri *Particulars* 2).[49] In short, it offers something of a best case for traditional nostalgia theories hoping to make sense of

[49] My vocabulary here is indebted to Charles Altieri and his synthetic elucidation of many strands of contemporary thought on emotions. The lexicon of affects that he develops in *The Particulars of Rapture* undergirds much of the discussion to follow, even when my conclusions diverge from his. Worth noting is that he—and following him, I—use the term affect freely as an "umbrella term" to cover "the entire range of states that are bounded on one side by pure sensation and on the other by thoughts that have no visible or tangible impact on our bodies" (2). Thus, for example, emotions are examples or categories of affects, not something separately opposed to them.

Shahid's work. By showing how those theories fall short even here (and how the emotion-concept itself is ultimately insufficient to capture what is of greatest interest about the poem's nostalgia), I intend to motivate the fundamental rethinking of nostalgia that is necessary to grapple with the rest of Shahid's oeuvre, which often deviates much more significantly from the pat definition of "emotion" quoted above. Most crucially, I will argue, the tendency to frame nostalgia in terms of action, and hence narrative, is deeply misleading for attempts to read poetry such as Shahid's.

For the reader's convenience, I begin my discussion by quoting the poem in full.

> Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox,
> my home a neat four by six inches.
>
> I always loved neatness. Now I hold
> the half-inch Himalayas in my hand.
>
> This is home. And this is the closest
> I'll ever be to home. When I return,
> the colors won't be so brilliant,
> the Jhelum's waters so clean,
> so ultramarine. My love
> so overexposed.
>
> And my memory will be a little
> out of focus, in it
> a giant negative, black

and white, still undeveloped. (29)[50]

Developing my reading of the poem will require me first to explore a handful of tempting, but telling misreadings, as they have been put forward by some of Shahid's best readers. This route will allow us best to see the constraints of received thought about nostalgia.

Bruce King—among the foremost of scholars of Indian poetry in English, having written perhaps the most comprehensive and sensitive history of the tradition in his *Modern Indian Poetry in English*— provides a convenient starting place. His work offers two ways of framing "Postcard" (as I shall hereafter abbreviate the poem's title). The first puts the poem in a bigger picture, a move we should be grateful for on two counts: it expands our sense of context but reminds us of the dangers of fixing the meaning of that context. Specifically, King locates Shahid's early verse within a tradition of "Indian Islamic writing since the mid-nineteenth century, when the British destroyed the social fabric of Delhi after the Mutiny" (*Modern* 262). Like others in the tradition, he says, Shahid "looks backward to a supposedly unified culture and nation he has lost and which he tries to recapture in his imagination, friendships and verse" (262). Herein lies both the insight and its pitfall. Nostalgia has indeed informed a tradition of Indian Islamic writing—in fact, one that extends further into the past than King's claim allows.[51] But King goes too far when he specifies that it is for "a supposedly unified culture and nation." Particularly when we include pre-"Mutiny" poets in this lineage, the appeal to "nation" and

[50] All citations of Shahid's poems are from his collected poems, *The Veiled Suite*, unless otherwise marked.

[51] The poet Mir Taqi Mir (1723-1810), for example, would surely need to be included in this lineage. As Russel and Islam have presented him, Mir is acutely aware of the declining Mughal court culture well before the mutiny: "This age is not like that which went before it / The times have changed," they translate one couplet (246). As with Shahid and others, Delhi is at the heart of this nostalgia: "There was a city, famed throughout the world, / where dwelt the chosen spirits of the age: / Delhi its name, fairest among the fair. / Fate looted it and laid it desolate, / And to that ravaged city I belong" (quoted on 260).

national "culture" become obviously anachronistic. More importantly, however, even if these writers *were* to invoke such a unity in their poetry, we need not attribute the trope to personal belief any more than we assume that Ghalib (surely a premier figure in inaugurating this tradition) must have held, because he participates in a tradition that freely invokes it, that there exists literally a bird called Huma which feeds exclusively on bones.[52]

As Aaron Santesso, a scholar of 18th century England, might remind us: nostalgia poetry has never been as autobiographical as popular imagination would have us believe. Santesso devotes a fair amount of attention, for example, to the popular use of Eton College as a nostalgic motif in the period, a period which he argues saw the birth of a new genre: the "nostalgia poem" proper. Thomas Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" is typical. However, Santesso points out that despite centuries of critics assuming that Gray must himself have missed his days at Eton, "it is plainly not true that for Gray at Eton, 'everything was harmonious and delightful,' as one critic states" (65). Gray's personal letters, for example, evince deep skepticism about the place. His poetic work uses Eton for reasons entirely separate from confessional autobiography. Granted, Shahid invites a certain amount of autobiographical connection with his poetry. We need not assume, however, that the line between conviction and trope is clear, nor particularly important or useful. Assuming so leads all to easily, as it does for King in a moment of particular ungraciousness, to facile comparisons between Shahid's longing and its object: "as a gay, pork-eating, beer drinker," chides King, "it is unlikely he could ever have been at ease in the culture for which he was nostalgic" (*Rewriting* 211).

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[52] See Pritchett 112-114 for a discussion of this bird in several ghazals, including one by Ghalib. Pritchet's book in general affords a nice introduction to the sharp change in Urdu literary sensibility after British backlash against Mutiny, as well as a robust defense of the "unnaturalness" of the poetry that preceded it. This is very much the tradition of poetry in which Shahid will place himself as his career develops.

Gratefully, King is not always so ornery. He may have become increasingly skeptical of Shahid's work as it grew more ghazal-indebted, political, and pro-Kashmir, but at least initially King heard in "Postcard" a fairly universal experience shared with consummate craft and ingenuity. The universalism of the reading, while apt enough, is worth highlighting for what it forecloses on interpretively, which it turns out is precisely what interests me in this chapter. King invites readers to recognize in the poem one of those those moments when you find that "you cannot go home again as you and it have both changed" (263). Most readers can undoubtedly oblige him; such moments are familiar. Indeed, if our goal is to gain critical insight into nostalgia itself, they may be too familiar. Our quick recognition threatens to answer our questions before we have even gotten around to asking the most interesting ones—why, for example, we come at particular moments to regard as *home* a place where we no longer live, as a place in fact that no longer exists; why, in other words, the past comes to be thought of as holding a home that the present could never offer. The appeal of the universal reading lies in its ability to avoid confronting and differentiating the profusion of answers to that question. Because the experience is universal, it needs no explanation.

Many critics have admittedly brought a more situated and political set of concerns to the text, but King's universalizing reveals a more common tendency within nostalgia criticism than may at first be obvious. He, like many others, assumes that the cause of the poem's nostalgia is straightforwardly available to reader and poet alike. Critics commonly imagine that nostalgia is a kind of symptomatic response to some particular condition: the postcolonial, the diasporic, the modern, or even just the human, as for King. Whether one sees Shahid "under the impossible nostalgia specific to postcolonial migrancy" (Tageldin 234) or "portray[ing] a Muslim's exile as a kind of Sisyphean enterprise" (Mattawa 1594), the assumption remains clear: it is "as"

representative of some identity, the sufferer of some condition, that Shahid speaks. That "as" is all over criticism of Shahid's work. In an article linking him and Salman Rushdie, Jennie Chiu exemplifies the stylistic tic, beginning clause after clause with a qualifying "as": "[a]s immigrant postcolonial writers" (25), "[a]s expatriate writers," "as emigrant intellectuals" (36). To read Shahid in this way, and in particular so to read his nostalgia, is to restore identity- and belief-centric assumptions precisely at the moment when—I will argue later in the chapter—his turn from emotion to feeling seeks to complicate them. For now, I stress only that, however obvious the proximate cause of the speaker's nostalgia may be in the figure of the postcard, there is no corresponding obviousness about ultimate causes. It is my larger contention that such haziness arises not from artifice—e.g., the strategic suppression of context by a poet striving for wider resonance—but from nostalgia's own porousness and uncertainty.

Taking this insight to heart will require that we bear in mind that nostalgia is not itself a condition stably sitting in the background of one's life, leaving one simply to fall into and out of awareness of it at random. Nostalgia is produced and elicited at particular moments, and in those moments the world looks differently than otherwise. Look again at "Postcard." We likely remember enough of its sophistication to expect two layers of home: the fantasy and the (anticipated) disappointment of reality. There are, however, three—and an explosively ambiguous three at that. First, there is the home that Shahid hides by pointing at—a private "this"—which could be variously the place with the mailbox (which we might call, not inconsequentially, either "America" or "abroad"), the place-concept evoked by the postcard, the postcard, or even the poem itself. Second, there is the home to which that first home is merely "closest." Finally, there is the home to which he not only can but will return. The postcard occasions the discovery of some unbridgeable distance between all three. Why? And what if we

do not imagine this as the discovery of some neutral matter of fact (e.g., as a structural claim about existence in general); what if we focus instead on how nostalgia opens up this space, disrupts on-goingness of life for Shahid in this particular way at this particular time? This section will flirt with these questions—raising, for example, the strangeness of receiving a *postcard* from home, a strangeness Shahid heightened in revision—but the core philosophical questions I leave for the following section and a poem, "A Butcher," where context means so much more.[53] For now, I return to the insights left by prior readers of "Postcard."

My claim is not that nostalgia is independent from such things as postcoloniality, modernity, or migrancy, simply that it is not a knee-jerk response to them, nor is it exhausted by their framing. Nostalgia may not have such built-in frames, but scholars have wanted with good reason to discuss the ways specific instances plug into those frames. At the most ambitious end of the spectrum, some scholars posit a larger homology between these conditions when refracted through nostalgia. If that is the case, it may seem like quibbling to problematize frames; what matters is that nostalgia, like other emotions, "situate[s] the agent within a narrative and generate[s] some kind of action" (Altieri *Particulars* 2). What might that narrative be? How does it map onto the world and what action therefore flows from it?

Take Jahan Ramazani, for example. He approaches "Postcard" from the perspective of "postcolonial poetry," the subject of his path-breaking book, *The Hybrid Muse*. According to his account there, "The postcolonial poem, like a postcard, risks miniaturizing, idealizing, and ultimately displacing the remembered native landscape" (12). We can push this claim in either of two directions, depending on how emphatically we pronounce its final modifier, "remembered." As Ramazani's comment observes, Shahid's is a canny poem. The question is whether its

[53] See below for a discussion of the draft history of the poem.

canniness lies in merely ironic disillusionment or whether it opens a space for nostalgia outside the dangerous dynamic of postcards and their displaced landscapes. If the former, i.e., if we believe that nostalgia fatally distorts memory and its authentic purchase on the world and that Shahid simply acknowledges this, we are in good—if unsympathetic—company within nostalgia criticism. Susan Stewart's *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* exemplifies this strand of thought, which focuses on the oft-noted nostalgia industry and its tendency to commodify memory in "neat" packages like postcards. For Stewart, infamously, nostalgia is a "social disease" (23). To read Shahid alongside Stewart's work is therefore to see him indicting the fetishizing power of the postcard. There may be some truth in that—"Postcard"'s speaker does invoke the rather pessimistic-sounding metaphor, "out of focus," for the future of his memory—but the immense body of Shahid's consistently nostalgic poetry suggests that its concern is less with the postcard than with the nostalgic reflection it prompts.[54]

Part of what makes Stewart's approach unsatisfying is that it presumes a privileged access to truth (or, what amounts to the same thing, a special freedom from ideology). "Nostalgia, like any form of narrative," Stewart claims, "is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt absence" (23). The postcard becomes an emblem of that absence. Other critics are less categorical—perhaps the past *was* real, but nostalgia has "exaggerated" and

[54] A more productive way to utilize Stewart's and other Marxian analyses would be to approach Shahid's reception within the communities that circulate his poems as nostalgic tokens, much like postcards. On the other side of the poem-token divide, Ananya Kabir has also done useful work drawing out Shahid's relationship to Kashmiri craftwork and the commodified circuits it travels (see especially pages 109-113). Both approaches, though useful in their own way, miss what interests me here: the nuances of Shahid's negotiation of nostalgia.

"idealiz[ed]" it (Gross 425). Truth, however, is not so simple a matter, as several decades of poststructuralist thought have taught us. Memory studies in particular has founded a rich discipline on the insight that all memory is constructed:

> Despite the unavoidable heterogeneity of the terminology, there are two generally agreed-upon central characteristics of (conscious) remembering: its relationship to the present and its constructed nature. Memories are not objective images of past perceptions, even less of a past reality. They are subjective, highly selective reconstructions, dependent on the situation in which they are recalled. (Erll *Memory* 8)

We must therefore be wary of fixating on the falsity, or even the exaggeration, of nostalgia. While it is true that nostalgia constructs the past (though not, I shall argue, necessarily or even for the most part narratively), constructedness *per se* is not where its limitations lie. Moreover, exaggeration can be thought in less epistemic terms as salience production or as intensity. That said, nostalgia's constructions do not sever it from concerns with the past. We cannot throw out the past entirely and look only at memory's interaction with and symptomatic relationship to the present. At the very least, in doing so we must be sensitive the ways in which nostalgia remembers the past *as* past. The tenuous relationship between the three "homes" of the postcard, the poet's relating to it, and his eventual return are all part of his nostalgia. It cannot be reduced to one or two of the three. Shahid in this poem finds himself involved in a postcard in a capacity that is far larger and more complex than fantasy plain and simple. It is that complex involvement to which critics and readers are called to respond.

A more popular way of taking the canniness of Shahid's poem, however, sees it as acknowledging the structural unachievability of nostalgic desire. Here we might emphasize that

not only is "Postcard" about nostalgia, it is itself nostalgic. The meditation recorded by the poem is what produces the distance between the poem's three homes. That distance does not neutrally preexist the poem, waiting for the nostalgic attempt to erase it by looking at a postcard. As Aaron Santesso further observes, nostalgia is one of those emotions that only grow stronger the more aware one is of feeling them (21). (Hence its tendency when registered as an epistemic problem to look like skepticism—another famously self-strengthening position—as we saw in Chapter 1).

One version of the "impossible nostalgia" line of thought would see it not as false, but as perverse. It is not because the past never existed that the nostalgic finds herself in the bind of impossible desire, but because it exists no longer. Insofar as it "orient[s] our attention toward that which we can no longer have" (Bennett 64), nostalgia is thus sometimes held to produce a structural impossibility that is unrelated to the truth-status of the remembered past. Nostalgia would then be less a delusion than "a kind of necrophilia" (Bennett 79). There may be an element of truth to the claim that nostalgia sometimes threatens to turn into fixation, "libidinally bind[ing] us to the story" of our beloved object's loss (Bennet 64), preventing us thereby from finding other perhaps more productive ways of engaging the world. Whether nostalgia seizes *Shahid's* imagination in such a pathological way, however, is a narrowly biographical question of little specific interest to this study. It seems unlikely. One can point to non-nostalgic poems or to anecdotes from his life, but the larger picture is better served by asking not whether we are bound to the story of loss (our affective involvement requires it, albeit it does not require that we believe it), but rather what that binding enables.

A slightly more situated and political version of the above position belongs to Ramazani. While "Postcard" is far from overtly political, Ramazani's framing suggests an urgent need for figures like Shahid to acknowledge the dangers of their desire. Shahid "suggests that memory

and artifice transform the very past he pursues" and so recognizes that the nostalgic poem is a self-defeating endeavor (*Hybrid* 12). The poem's seductions—the fact that it is not only about nostalgia, but *is* nostalgic—then become mere symptom, attesting to the trauma of postcolonial rupture; the poem in no way endorses its nostalgia. This distancing is crucial, for there is a standing temptation for the postcolonial subject to deny that the precolonial "past has been transformed irrevocably by colonialism and modernity" (*Hybrid* 10). Most obviously this means that, as things stand, we can no longer simply return to the way things were. It also means, though, that our understanding of "the way things were" is inescapably shaped by our present situation. The threat of a false sense of home (read: investment in the nation's supposedly pure and glorious past) is a standing danger for postcolonial thought, and we can applaud Shahid's general avoidance of it. In this regard, one particularly apt anecdote has Shahid responding to the suggestion by Amitav Ghosh that he is "the closest Kashmir ha[s] to a national poet" by exclaiming, "A national poet may be. But not a *nationalist* one—please, not that" (Ghosh 209). Nonetheless, the achievement of avoiding nationalist dogmatism is relatively minor, and I find myself still wondering, what else might investing himself in impossible returns enable for Shahid?

Still, before turning squarely to face my own reading of the text, there remain two other theories of impossible nostalgia to work through, both accounting for nostalgia's self-reflexivity by separating nostalgia's cognitive-epistemic from its affective dimensions. The first is more personal, the second more social. To grasp the former, let us consider the text in light of a simple distinction between first-order dramatic content and the second-order form it takes as a poem. We can assume that there are identifications taking place at both levels: the speaker-character who holds the postcard and the poet who presents him to us, perhaps ironically. The postcard

holder might affirm the desired object (an ideal home), while the poet ironizes the desire and empties it of its force to impel action. This distinction is something along the lines of a feeling/thought opposition, where the poet affirms the emotional pull of nostalgia without committing himself to any of the beliefs that it ought to entail. Put more unsympathetically, we have a conflict between feeling and identification, where the desire persists without the speaker believing himself to be the kind of person who naively desires such things. Although I have phrased it rather unfavorably, the basic distinction recalls a variety of critical formulations that attempt to salvage nostalgia, such as what Svetlana Boym calls "reflective nostalgia" (41) or Shaden Tageldin calls "being longing" (261). In all these cases, however, there remains much theoretical work to be done to clarify what exactly these affective stances open up. Why would reflection unconnected to attitude-formation and consequent action be useful? I find the initial opposition between ironic poet and committed speaker and the attendant opposition of thought to feeling quite unhelpful in answering such questions. What we need is not to strip feeling of its beliefs (which assumes that it had them to begin with), but rather to explore how feeling organizes the world, produces salience, and gives value to its own endeavors.

There is, however, one notable way in which scholars have put the feeling/thought opposition to specific use. That is on the more social end of the scale mentioned above. On this view, the poem does two things simultaneously. It immunizes against overhasty epistemic or practical commitments by acknowledging that nostalgia cannot really get what it wants. (So much we have already seen.) But it also enables new affective communities, drawn around a now defanged nostalgia.[55] At least two academic readers of Shahid's work have held this view, one

[55] Cf. John Su's analysis of the ethics of nostalgia in novels, containing "fantasies of lost or imagined homelands" that "provide a means of establishing ethical ideals that can be shared by

emphasizing how nostalgia can open authors to new "horizons of solidarity" (Chakraborty 55) and another focusing more on readers to observe that nostalgia can "evoke empathy" (Chiu 25). It is hard to disagree with either observation, but they have relatively little to say about the specificity of nostalgia—except to observe, crucially, that a nostalgic community shorn of confidence in its desired home is a non-dogmatic community, because it is aware that there is nothing natural or inevitable about what brings it together. Still, we have arrived at a point where we no longer have anything to say about nostalgia's content; no longer does nostalgia have anything to say about the standing of the world or the way it should be. This is too great a loss to countenance, particularly in the case of Shahid's work.

Let us turn for a moment to the draft history of "Postcard." We have been reading the poem as presented in its final form, in 1987's *The Half-Inch Himalayas*. As it turns out, the various versions that preceded ours reveal much about how the poem came to be as reflective as scholars have praised it for being. The earliest typed draft, dated October 12, 1979, puts much of the text on the back of the postcard itself, as a voice from Kashmir to the poet.[56] "Kashmir shrinks into *your* mailbox," it reads now (emphasis added). "You always loved neatness, so take / it out and hold your home." The voice here is one of affectionate sympathy, offering a token of home and then gently admonishing him for taking it with too straight a face, as if Shahid's last letter had expressed such romanticized longing for home that the only sensible response was to lessen his pain with a playfully self-deflating souvenir—its written message reminding him that

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diverse groups who have in common only a longing for a past that never was" (3). His novelistic focus, however, takes him into territory quite different from that before us.

[56] The various early drafts of the poem are available on *The Beloved Witness Project* website, a partial online archive of Shahid's life and work. Two distinct final versions exist of "Postcard"—the published one under discussion in this section and one submitted as part of Shahid's MFA thesis, which is also available in its entirety on the aforementioned website.

home is also a place of drab colors and routine boredom: “Things here are as usual.” The next draft, dated the same day, adds the words that will become the crux of the final version’s nostalgia: “This / is home. Be sure from that distance, / this is home.” Here, however, they are not nostalgic but hortatory. The migrant is in danger of losing his roots, may already have lost them: “this is the closest / you’ll ever be to home” now.

Hand-written edits to the third typed draft, dated the following day, begin the gradual shift from the dialogic to the monologic. Slowly in subsequent drafts lines that were in the voice of the postcard sender are given to the receiver until no voices remain but that of the receiver himself. As this happens, the tone of the poem shifts ever toward that reflective ideal of nostalgia prized by many readers of Svetlana Boym. First the voice of the sender is bracketed off as part of the Kashmir that has been shrunken to fit the poet’s mailbox, made as much a lyrical token of the poet’s feelings as real words from afar worth responding to. The reference to “things” being “as usual” is moved to the end, a tagged on stanza destined partly for the trash heap and partly for inclusion in much later poem. Insofar as the poem is typically or even ideally reflective—insofar as it acknowledges the traps set by nostalgia—it gets there in the drafting process by editing out its engagement with the world. The finality of loss lies in part in no longer acknowledging that there are real voices emerging from it—a point that will reemerge in his published writing a decade later when he takes on the Kashmir crisis and reintegrates the scrapped lines from this poem into the new context of “Dear Shahid.”

The final version is beautifully, poignantly solipsistic and cut off from the world of Kashmir. Note how it must feel to receive a postcard from home. The initial drafts motivate the strangeness of the gesture, but now we are left to wonder. Who sent it? Surely not his family—if so, why not send something more personal, a substantial letter or, if a photo, one taken

personally or of something more personal than the landscape writ large. It is as if he can no longer receive intimate exchanges with the land, only touristy tokens. Of course, the usual person from whom to receive a postcard, a tourist, would be even harder to bear, as if Shahid has become estranged enough from the place that a mere tourist feels that he has a closer relationship with the landscape than Shahid to warrant sharing it.

This larger context of sending and receiving postcards informs what I take to be the force of the poem's suggestion that some of the postcard's disappointment lies in its showing the poet his "love / so overexposed." The obvious meaning of these words is that his beloved (Kashmir) is blown out in the image, details lost amid the all-too-vivid brilliance; but also that his beloved—or perhaps his love for it—is too exposed, too tawdrily on display. That can be taken in a proprietary sense, but need not be so. Also available is the suggestion that home is something known properly only in intimacy, to see it on display is for it to cease being home.[57] That is to say that nostalgia misses familiarity and wants so much more than an image of familiarity or a view onto the familiar (voyeuristically, as if from outside a window looking in). Given in negation as it is, however, we can note the connection with the generic possibilities of poetry, indeed of literature in general. The poem cannot share a unique memory, but it can deny its commonness and hence get us to sympathize with the felt inadequacy of substitutes like postcards. This fact suggests that the ostensibly liberatory "being longing" that readers like Tageldin uphold may be more an artifact of genre and medium than of political commitment or ethical enlightenment.

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[57] Compare the overexposure here, for example, to other images of harsh brilliance elsewhere *The Half-Inch Himalayas* (e.g., "Vacating an Apartment" and "The Other Occupant"), associated with the sanitizing destruction of memory and with ethnic cleansing: "the cleaners wipe my smile / with Comet fingers" and "whitewash my voicestains / make everything new / clean as Death" (38).

By emphasizing the surrounding context implicit in the scene of meditation as well as the affective shifts of the poem, I hope to draw attention to what so much discussion of "Postcard" misses—that Shahid's involvement with the postcard is crucially affective. That is to say, it is not the monologue of a self-contained subject that seizes the postcard as an objective opportunity to express an attitude entirely immanent to the speaker's agency. I intimated as much at the start of this section when I noted that "emotion" was only imperfectly available to capture what the poem does. Now we are in a position to clarify and expand on that claim and its attendant stakes.

Consider the uncertainties and instabilities in the display of the poem's emotion. In his sensitive formal reading of the poem, Bruce King traces the ironic wit of "I always loved neatness" in the unravelling structure of the poem as it mirrors the unravelling of the "I" itself. As the poem begins,

> Decision, purpose, control and neatness are reinforced by the careful balance of syllables. The eight or nine syllables in each line of the first couplet and the way the first four lines are visually of equal length establishes a pattern which is varied as disturbed emotions are brought forth. (263)

King appeals to the language of "emotional disturbance" to convey the postcard's affective intrusion. Bringing to bear a more precise vocabulary, we can see this as the moment when the poem shifts interest from "emotion" to "feeling." Emotions, to remind ourselves of Charles Altieri's above-cited definition, "are affects involving the construction of attitudes that typically establish a particular cause and so situate the agent within a narrative and generate some kind of action or identification" (*Particulars* 2). Talk of emotions, however, is heavily colored by Anglo-American analytic philosophy and its cognitive framing of emotion within a broader theory of agency. Feelings, by contrast, are much less developed and thus also less readily subsumed

within the agentive model. They are more primary. Feelings are "characterized by an imaginative engagement in the immediate processes of sensation" (Altieri 2). Caution must be taken here lest we assume "immediate process of sensation" refers to the immediate availability of sense data for reflection. That is not the claim. Immediacy refers here to the idea of involvement, process, and action. Feelings disturb emotions because they remain intimately bound to objects' interface with the feeling subject before that subject can "make sense" of them. They thus resist articulation, trouble ready-made interpretations, and provide an ever-renewing site for the contestation of what agency and identity can mean.

Because the poem is attentive to the process of feeling and responding to that feeling, it does not offer any claims. It does not even operate on the level of claims. If emotions confidently "establish a cause…and generate some kind of action," they do open themselves to counter-claims (that is not the cause). But as a negotiation of feeling, the poem is more interested in the space of ambiguous becoming and sensation opened up by nostalgia than in any consequent claims that are retroactively narrated back onto it. When Kashmiri journalist Basharat Peer writes in his memoir, "Kashmir! There she was: the bluest of skies over the browns, greens, and blues of the million-inch Himalayas" (99), it is precisely to reclaim the literalness of identity Shahid takes away in this poem, with its "half-inch Himalayas."

I have written much of this section from the perspective of the usual theorists of nostalgia and their attention to what home means and how people claim it. Responding to those who conceive of nostalgia as attitude-formation has obliged me to attend to what home can mean as an intentional object. Doing so, I honed in on the intentionally ambiguous reference of the term in "Postcard." But the word "home" *in the poem* does not really bear the weight of that analysis. Of the three senses I noted, one does not even attach to the word "home" in the poem at all, but

rather to another: "return." As we read the poem, nostalgia is introduced much more stealthily. First, there is the seeming satisfaction of an "always" affirmed in a "now." But the affirmation is off-kilter. Rather than confirming the "always"—*I've always wanted this, and now I have it!*—the "now" threatens instead to overturn it—*I* had *always wanted it, but* now… Of course, the poem does not choose either of my paraphrases. Neither "and" nor "but" conjoin "always" and "now." The tense ambiguity keeps the nostalgia incipient and us unsure of its status.

When nostalgia announces itself to the poem with full force, it is not in the distance between two "homes," but in the abyss between the referents of "this." "This is home," and yet "this is the closest / I'll ever be to home." The superficial contradiction forces us to infer that something has changed. To my knowledge, all so-far published interpretations of the poem keep the two pronouns as close together as possible in terms of meaning. First Shahid refers to the postcard as container, then as object: *the postcard shows home* and *holding it is as close as I will ever get to that place it shows*. "Home" is forced to do the moving, from idea to fact. But "home" might instead remain an idea. The poem seems, in fact, to require it, with its reference to return. In my reading, by contrast, what shifts is the plane of reflection. Whereas previously Shahid had been talking of objects—*this postcard is home*—now he writes of relations—*this relationship I'm having is the closest one possible.* This reading allows the kind of metapoetic gesture often associated with lyric poetry. Instead of his physical stance with respect to the postcard-object, it is his affective-poetic engagement with it that comes into focus. Whether we take the prior interpretation, favored by critics, or as I am proposing is hardly inconsequential. For while the former interpretation leaves us mourning the referential emptiness of the home-concept, the latter redirects our attention to what the poem accomplishes and where it leaves its speaker.

To see that, we must return to the poem's last stanza, which brings the greatest intrusion

of feeling into what often at least seems a straightforwardly emotional poem. This intrusion comes tied to an aspect too often neglected by scholars citing the poem: it ends not with the postcard but with memory. The two are not the same. Curiously, memory is futural—it will be, and even then there will remain something undeveloped. That something, moreover, is only *contained* in memory; it is not the memory itself. The insistently (and persistingly) inchoate black-and-white negative is, I argue, the nostalgic core of Shahid's poetry. By calling it a core, however, I do not want to suggest that it is stable or even substantive. It is a feeling or, more properly, a tendency in feeling to which Shahid's nostalgia responds and for which he cultivates it. Nostalgia thus continues for "Postcard" at least to name something more agentive, personal, and therefore emotional. But it does so in the service of a tendency of feeling that cannot be subsumed into those categories, remaining rather outside and continuing to exert pressure on and to disturb them. Because it lies out of reach, it can structure and impel the poetry, but it cannot define or contain it.

We can put this in other terms by looking to the phenomenology of nostalgia. According to Steven Galt Crowell, "nostalgic yearning is not a function of the difference between past and present worlds, but arises from a radical disruption in *the time of the I*, a noncoincidence that thwarts every attempt to figure one's 'own' past as narratively continuous with the present" (96). Taking this point up, Jeff Malpas places nostalgia in productive conflict with Heidegger's emphasis on the capacity of moods to dissolve (or absorb) the self into the world. By contrast, Malpas argues, "in the case of nostalgia, it is the relation between self and world that is brought to the fore as problematic—and together with that, the very relation of the self to itself. What is at issue in nostalgia is our own self-identity" (Malpas chapter 8). But we must not understand Shahid's (or, more broadly, nostalgia's) concern with "relation of the self to itself" to be

primarily *self*-ish or self-centered in the usual senses of these words. Malpas' understanding of nostalgia, like Crowell's, emphasizes the rupture at the core of the self that breaks down ready-made narratives. Malpas helpfully notes that this is the reason why nostalgia generally seems to inhabit fragments: images, smells, flashes of memory, rather than more elaborated forms of narrative. Whereas both Crowell and Malpas, however, turn immediately to ask how we find or make a "reconstituted narrative" (Malpas Chapter 8) after we realize our old one has broken down, Shahid does not bother returning to narrative at all. Instead, he inhabits the nostalgic mode for as long as he can, using it to open new ethical horizons. Shahid's poetry thus plays with those fragments and flashes that Malpas has identified as quintessentially nostalgic in order to deepen (in complexity and intensity) and broaden (in narrative potential and implicative reach) their resonance. The poem is thus a kind of self-making that does not presuppose narrative continuity (or its philosophical corollary, "identity"). Its ending intentionally leaves open the narrative break that so many theorists imagine we immediately repair.

Jahan Ramazani's off-hand (but astute) reference to "Postcard from Kashmir" quoted above would suggest a different reading of the ending. Memory's recession into darkness signals our prospective mourning of memory's eventual eclipse by the postcard. What this interpretation fails to observe, however, is the open-ended potential of the poem's close. The photo is "still"—not forever—undeveloped. Nor is it damaged by exposure. Its gigantic size, moreover, suggests a power and plenitude not readily captured by the displacement interpretation. We may be tempted to follow a line of willful anachronism, to see "Postcard" as an anticipation of Shahid's exile after the crisis in Kashmir begins in earnest, reading the poem's looming blur as a figure for what John J. Su calls the "haunting irony of nostalgia" (87). Unlike Susan Stewart, Su sees nostalgia

as concerned not with what was, but rather what "could have been" (12). The undeveloped photo thus becomes a sign of what Kashmir's fortune could have been, were it not shortly to devolve into such grave misfortune. While Shahid himself might have loved this resonance (it certainly fits with his later poetics, as we shall see), there is little sign in the poem to suggest that Shahid feels that Kashmir's future is particularly bleak or that his prospects of return are poor. The nostalgia of the poem is much more banal, and much less "exilic" in the strong sense of the term. Instead, it is the frayed fissure of nostalgic selfhood alone that concerns the poem's final blurred potential.

Here it is useful to draw a contrast with perhaps the most famous case of literary nostalgia associated with postcolonial South Asia: Salman Rushdie's story of how he came to write *Midnight's Children*. That story begins with a photograph of the home in which he was born (albeit taken before that particular event had transpired), which sits with him while he works as a passive reminder that "the past is home," until one day he actually returns to that home in the flesh. The effect the return has on him is immense. He comments:

> The photograph had naturally been taken in black and white; and my memory, feeding on such images as this, had begun to see my childhood in the same way, monochromatically. The colours of my history had seeped out of my mind's eye; now my other two eyes were assaulted by colours, by the vividness of the red tiles, the yellow-edged green of cactus-leaves, the brilliance of bougainvillaea creeper. It is probably not too romantic to say that that was when my novel Midnight's Children was really born; when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past to myself, not in the faded greys of old family-album snapshots, but whole, in CinemaScope and glorious Technicolor. ("Imaginary Homelands")

Immediately we see the contrast to Shahid's work. His approach is thus exactly opposite of Rushdie's. Rushdie begins bored by a black-and-white image, gets excited by an encounter with the color of the real thing and then returns home to restore color to his image. Shahid, by contrast, sees the past in vivid color only to anticipate the reality being more drab. His solution is to look further into the dark, the black-and-white undeveloped potential within his memory (distinct from the memory-surrogate photo). This is an affective solution. Rushdie's, by contrast, is epistemic. He becomes concerned with the process of "filtration" of the past, and becomes enamored of errors and quirks of remembrance. Shahid, as we will see especially in later sections, loses all but the most attenuated interest in the factuality of memory.

Receding into the inchoate, "Postcard" ends by dissolving identity and leaving us open to the de-subjectified possibilities nostalgia offers. Memory is dissociated from identity, and the one looms as the other recedes away. To play with the visual imagery of the poem, we might observe that closing stanza enacts a sort of "dolly zoom," i.e., the film technique whereby perspective distortion is continuously highlighted as the camera zooms while moving backwards or forwards. The effect can overwhelm and displace background details with the foreground, without actually changing the size and presence of the foregrounded object. Here, a photographic negative remains "in" the picture, but the "gigantic" size of its presence is finally felt. We pull away from the image, but our attention is ever more focused on that detail as we do so. In this way, an impressive mimetic effect replicates nostalgia's increased focus on a receding object. But this effect does not put blinders on us or emphasize our distraction from truth. Instead, we are only now accessing the memory that remained obscured so long as we remained distracted by the surface features of the nostalgic token.

Nonetheless, the poem remains in many ways quite personal. It does not articulate any

broad historical connections. It does not even address the existence of others. Identity is troubled, as in all nostalgia, and tossed aside in favor of a richer set of connections to the world. But where those connections lead and what kind of being-in-the-world they enable remain open questions. Shahid's later poetry will address both the possibilities opened for a self that acknowledges the gaps in its identity, as well as how those possibilities can lead to a structure of feeling that does not presuppose a neat identity to be disrupted. The dualistic structure of the "this" of home and the "this" of relating to it in the "closest" way possible need not found nostalgia, Shahid will discover.

The question, though, is, how does one move forward to explore the possibilities opened by nostalgia without falling into the trap of being a "nostalgic," that is, the person staring wistfully at the postcard? How does one choose instead to be what Shahid will come to refer to as a "nostalgist?" The key lies in finding a way to sustain nostalgia, to pursue lines of its resonance without losing sight of the contrast. In the terminology this chapter will propose, it is a matter of making an *exercise* of nostalgia. But to exercise nostalgia, to create new identifications with it, is to do more than to wait for it to come. It is to produce emotion. And that requires a reliable method. For Shahid, generic nostalgia provides one point of entrance. Nostalgic tropes give access to the emotion, which he can then finesse to his heart's content. Even then, however, he will find himself facing a second problem: how to find more than a momentary burst of passion that fades as soon as one re-enters the world. That problem, too, has its solutions, but for now he poses merely the first, generic question.

3.2 PHENOMENOLOGIES OF NOSTALGIA

Our reading of "Postcard from Kashmir" has raised some important issues. My hope is that they have sufficiently problematized received ways of reading nostalgia to warrant revisiting the topic

on the level of theoretical elaboration. This section, therefore, will turn first to phenomenological accounts of nostalgia, which are disappointingly under-utilized within literary studies. Then, with some new terminological and theoretical tool under our belts, we can turn to a second poem from the same volume as "Postcard," *The Half-Inch Himalayas*, namely "A Butcher." "A Butcher," although obviously nostalgic (and brilliantly read as such by Shaden Tageldin), is likely to confuse those looking for the predictable markers generally used to orient critics in discussing nostalgia, such as references to the past, a desire to return, or any of nostalgia's standard-issue imagery.

We saw in the last section that nostalgia is not a generalized condition that people live. They fall in and out of it, inadvertently. A postcard prompts Shahid's reverie, while for Steven Crowell, it is the way the light hits a certain bedpost (91-92). Unfortunately, few phenomenological (or, for that matter, any other theoretical) accounts take this moment of external prompting very seriously, but they do notice a sort of internal corollary. Nostalgic reverie tends to focus on "a moment or an image" from the past, a "little vignette" (Malpas 172, Crowell 85). These objects of focus—Crowell calls them "presentational contents"—are still, however, not the "proper object" requested by the question that guides phenomenological accounts: "To begin with, what are we nostalgic *about*—what is the proper object of nostalgia? Indeed *is* there a definite object?" (Casey 361). The answer to the latter formulation of the question, as we know from the last section, will be no, or at least not simply so. That is why we are turning to phenomenology in the first place. No, nostalgia "sees through" its presentational contents to something much broader, which is merely "localized" in the world through "traces" that invite nostalgic attention (Crowell 92, Casey 379). Each philosopher characterizes that broader something differently, wishing to stress some specific facet of it. For our part, let us call

it, in deference to nostalgia's etymology and our habit so far, "home"—bearing in mind the rather technical spin we are giving the term.

Home, in this sense, is crucially something that was never present to us, however much we may have lived in it. To make sense of this seeming paradox, we must recall a familiar phenomenological insight about worldhood and involvement. So long as we are involved in our day-to-day lives, most of the world—indeed, the world as such—does not become "present" to us, remains rather a kind of stable background. Consequently, we can say that

> we never once, at any exactly designatable time, experienced the world of our childhood as an isolable entity or event: not because it was *before* our time or *out of time* altogether but because it was never, and could not be, the proper content, the "object," of any experience or total set of experiences. Such a world, the world-under-nostalgement, has a past of another type, another ontic order, from that of the recollected past—even if it is often cued in by remembrances of things past. (Casey 366)

World-under-nostalgement may be a bit of a mouthful (whose clunkiness encourages my simply referring to it as home), but a number of important consequences follow from Casey's locating nostalgia's investment in a "world in the mode of absolute, irreversible pastness" (377). Each will help us re-describe an attribute of nostalgia that has become perhaps too familiar.

Recall nostalgia's notoriously tenuous hold on its truth claims. The editors of a recent special issue of *Memory Studies*—"Nostalgia and the Shapes of History"—note how readily the mood can be seen as "a betrayal of [not only history but] memory itself" (Atia and Davies 181). This (mis)perception stems—according to these phenomenological accounts—from a category mistake. Recollection targets things that were, or can be said to have been, present. The worlds

targeted by nostalgia therefore cannot be recalled in the form of a discrete memory. Nostalgia thus does not fail or betray memory; it simply does something different (which is not to say that it cannot *distract* from memory, but that is another matter). Casey welcomes this news, saying that nostalgia "liberates us from a preoccupation with the rigors of recollection" (366).[58] Whether and to what extent we agree will depend on our ability to find value in being liberated from epistemic rigor.

Getting to that question requires going through another. I mentioned earlier nostalgia's presentational contents, which are what would ostensibly ground what claims to truth it has. And they do indeed have a "nonfictive" aspect, which is a form of memory. These presentational contents, however, are not really situated in historical time, the time of interpersonal verifiability in the "world of work," as Crowell notes (92). They are instead located in "aeonic" time. Nostalgia longs for "eras, seasons, or aeons," not historical events (Hart 406). And nostalgia's seasons are not just fuzzy points in time (merely imprecisely located in the world of work), however much they may appear to be. They draw the world of work into question. Put otherwise, nostalgic memories do not tend toward historical specificity only to miss it, whereas memories in their own way do and do in ways that are indefinitely specifiable. One might correctly say, "I remember you once told me X, when we were kids," without knowing either date or time, and in so saying the possibility remains open for it to be specified at some later date. What I miss about our childhood friendship, by contrast, is not so locatable. *That* tends toward timelessness, "atemporality" as Trigg puts it. Memories can (grammatically, as Wittgenstein would say) be located, specified, and generally made more precise. Nostalgia can only be elaborated and made

[58] For other accounts of the distinction between nostalgia and recollective memory, see Hart (402) and, especially, Crowell, who thinks his colleagues have been too generous in referring even (oxymoronically in his view) to "nostalgic memory" (92-93).

more diffuse, however much I may appeal to specific memories to elicit it ("Remember that time when…" looks different when said nostalgically than when said with a practical interest in fact).

There are a number of clues to this effect. First is that the seasons of nostalgia seem to be intrinsically meaningful in a way that events are not. This is Crowell's argument. According to Crowell, an event—and hence a cognitive memory that recalls it—gains its meaning in relation to other events (narrated into a history). A nostalgic memory, by contrast, is much more self-sufficient. We might say that it is valuable in spite of the fact that the world goes on in indifferent ignorance of it. Here comes the unshakeableness of nostalgia, the fact that it persists despite being told its past is a fiction.

Another clue lies in the preference of nostalgia for backgrounds and stability. That preference is not a matter of avoiding change altogether, but of signaling that something essential is missing from the world, something necessary to the world's being a world—a sign that the world is not itself. That is why within a nostalgic frame of mind it can make sense *both* to say "this is home" and "this is [only] as close as I'll ever be to home," despite the logical and to some extent factual contradiction. The preference for backgrounds also explains nostalgia's tendency to prefer the punctual and stable image to the flux of narrative, which must draw connections from point to point.

Now that we have some sense of what nostalgia's quasi-object is, we can ask what it means that nostalgia turns to them in the first place. At this point, admittedly, the phenomenologists' lack of interest in historical context becomes more of a handicap. Nonetheless, what they have to say is suggestive. Drawing on Heideggerian discussions of "mood," Malpas suggests that nostalgia—for him, a kind of mood—is idiosyncratic in this regard.

> Although one of the characteristic features of moods is indeed a certain dissolution of the distinction between self and world, in the case of nostalgia, it is the relation between self and world that is brought to the fore as problematic—and together with that, the very relation of the self to itself. What is at issue in nostalgia is our own self-identity. (Malpas 167)

Malpas here drifts toward an existentializing approach, naturally enough given his source material, but I want to stress the availability of these insights for a more historically sensitive mind. The fixation on "our own self-identity" need not be taken to mean the assertion or even preservation of that self at the expense of openness to the world. "The discontinuity that is encountered in nostalgia, and that gives rise to its pain, is a discontinuity that exists between the self and the world in which it finds itself," Malpas says elsewhere, in perhaps a slightly more felicitous formulation (170). Again, of course, Malpas attributes this to our existential condition, as an "essential feature of our mode of being-in-the-world…even though it is in the experience of nostalgia that it becomes most clearly evident" (316, note 34). My own critical investments, by contrast, lead me to take the self/world discontinuity in more situated terms. To say that there is a discontinuity revealed between self and world in nostalgia can be true even if it is not ontologized as essentially true always, simply waiting to be revealed from time to time in nostalgia. That is, we can observe that nostalgia throws into question whether we are in fact a part of this world, whether our involvement and attunement with it is assured, historically or at least contextually. Nostalgia involves the coming-into-issue of our way of being in the world our world's way of having us in it.

To clarify this point, let us turn to a close reading of Shahid's "A Butcher," which quite evidently remains troubled and unresolved at its end, but in ways that are interesting not so much

existentially as politically, personally, and historically. Since this is the second text to come from Shahid's 1987 *The Half-Inch Himalayas,* it may be worth pausing to reflect on how the two texts fit into a larger nostalgic whole before proceeding further. The collection is, in fact, structured to follow a nostalgic line of thought. We have already read the book's opening poem, "Postcard from Kashmir," a standalone introduction before the main sequence of four sections, which follow a loose arc of longed-for homecoming. The first section jumps back in time to observe (as a barred outsider) Shahid's ancestors, from his parents' meeting in Delhi to precolonial Kashmir and India more generally. The second section fast-forwards to a more recent Delhi, now the city of Shahid's young adulthood. Third we come to the United States and scenes of departure, erasure, and loneliness. Finally, the book closes with a series of looks back toward Kashmir, now with images of present distance everywhere coming between the poet and his home.

So the nostalgia of "A Butcher" is assured, not only from internal evidence, but from its position in that arc, located as it is in the second section, pertaining to Delhi. "A Butcher" offers a vignette of disappointment and communion disrupted. Shahid (again we clearly hear the poet's persona speaking) is in Delhi, buying meat "near Jama Masjid." He and the butcher share a moment, or seem to, as they exchange poetic banter, each one quoting a couplet for the other to complete. In one of the poem's several moments of resonant ambiguity, the butcher "wraps [Shahid's] kilo of ribs," as if not only to package his purchase but also to bandage his emigrant body (which may or may not have also been the meat butchered in the exchange). The wholeness of the scene—their "moment of courtesy," as Shahid calls it—is immediately broken when money is exchanged. "Ghalib's ghazals go unrhymed," the poem ends, mimicking formally the interruption it describes. The phrase constitutes the only one-line stanza in a poem otherwise made up of (free-verse, unrhymed) couplets.

As I noted above, "A Butcher" never refers explicitly to the past. The text insistently locates itself in the here and now, from its opening deixis—"In this lane"—through each of its present tense verbs. (Echoes of the nostalgic deixis of "Postcard" are naturally relevant). Granted, there are whiffs of history. Urdu is "*still* fine on [the butcher's] lips" (emphasis added). And the poem's closing image, of "change / clutter[ing] our moment of courtesy," cashes in on a brilliant pun, where change not only rounds out the economic transaction, but names the force of history itself. Nonetheless, a conventional approach to nostalgia might feel somewhat bereft in the face of such a vague image of the lost home. On the other hand, it might feel vindicated by the vagueness, seeing that as strong evidence of nostalgia's idealizing haze.

At the opening of the last section, we noted that Bruce King positions these poems within a larger tradition of Indo-Islamic poetry that yearns for a "supposedly unified nation and culture." This poem, of course, names that culture a bit more forcefully, via the poets Ghalib and Mir, than does "Postcard." So we might wonder here about a problem raised by that claim, tabling at least for the moment our earlier concerns about too literal a reading of nostalgic tropology. If Delhi's "social fabric" could indeed be "destroyed," as King concedes, why hedge Shahid's nostalgia with a pejorative "supposedly"? It would seem that King imagines there to be a category mistake in the "unity" that nostalgics (King believes) attribute to the past in the form of a world-historical claim. An echo and a clarification of this idea can be found in Shaden Tageldin's noting how "illusory" the nostalgic's remembrance of feeling "at home" (i.e., whole, participating in the "unity" before its loss) can be (233). The world-historical claim of unity thus comes with a built-in claim that misrepresents one's position in that unity. The phenomenology we are now familiar with would point out that the relevant unity comes not in the form of a disguised claim, but instead from the desired "object's" being a world and not properly an object

at all.

Shaden Tageldin's deft and generative reading of "A Butcher" provides a helpful foil and eventual baseline against which to measure my own. On her reading, the poem leads us through a scene of frustrated fantasy. Our guide is an émigré, returned with high hopes to celebrate Eid al-Adha. He wants desperately to feel at home, a comfort denied him by history and his adoptive country. So when he meets his rooted counterpart—a butcher—he cleaves to the chance at communion, hoping to purchase not meat alone, but also a seat at the nation's table. "As native," though, the butcher "decides how much 'home' the émigré will get," and his decision is bound to disappoint (Tageldin 255). With divergent investments in the nation and its past, the two figures meet on unequal terrain. Economic as well as geographic disparity keeps enough space between them for the threat of violence to echo. According to Tageldin, we can hear that echo being actualized on the metaphorical plane. The clue lies in the ambiguity noted above, where the customer is given "his" ribs from among those of the festival goats "hacked" up. Like the festival goats, who also "show up in Delhi mainly on holidays," the émigré is sacrificed, albeit to confirm not "the believer's submission to God," but "the native's pact of country" (Tageldin 259-260).

The text is not, however, the lament of the sacrificed. Nor is it a bitter account of rejection. It is, Tageldin says, the story of the poet's escape from "the prison of impossible nostalgia." If previously his nostalgia had tended toward the inaccessible and the absolute, his disappointed attempt at belonging has at least educated him on this point. Now he knows that belonging is not his lot, accepts that he will always "*be longing*" (Tageldin 260). Tageldin approves of this acceptance, leaving us squarely back in the land of Boym's reflective nostalgia.

Tageldin's suggestion to read the poem as an expression of perennial longing is

nevertheless compelling. Indeed, I can think of at least one direction in which her reading can be pushed even further (admittedly departing from Tageldin's conclusion in doing so). Given the centrality of the Urdu literary tradition to the poem's "moment of courtesy," it is suggestive that unrequited longing for a cruel and indifferent beloved is the thematic staple of the ghazal genre. Granted, "A Butcher" is a far cry stylistically from the traditional ghazal, but its playful references, both structural and overt, suggest that we might not be too far afield to see the butcher as a species of beloved. The ghazal lover, of course, yearns to be sacrificed. For the poet of "A Butcher" to imagine himself as the hacked up goat thus becomes both accusation and masochistic thrill. If this seems too far afield from the stuff of romantic poetry, it may be worth recalling how grotesque the ghazals of Ghalib, which the customer quotes, can get.[59]

By pushing the reading in this direction, however, we confront the problem of content anew. The content of this longing matters, while the very impossibility of union with the generic ghazal beloved suggests an irrelevance of content. However fuzzy and uncommitted nostalgia may be about its objects, however, it is not without content, as "A Butcher" illustrates itself with its attentiveness to politics. Consider, e.g., the figure Shahid has chosen for what Tageldin calls his "rooted counterpart." A Muslim butcher would at any time be a surprising figure for stable nativity in postcolonial India, let alone one in which Urdu lies "bloodied" in his hands. (But is the butcher the brutalizer or the hapless bystander, holding a dying body in his hands? The word itself smells of slaughter—"he butchered it.")[60] The image suggests the loss of writing in Urdu in postcolonial India. But it perhaps also suggests, if the butcher is the perpetrator, his

[59] Consider, for example, a verse in which the lover offers his liver as a kind of kebab, skewered by the beloved's eyelashes (Ghalib 50).

[60] An earlier version, published as "The Jama Masjid Butcher" in *In Memory of Begum Akhtar* (1979), is far less richly ambiguous. The butcher "hacks the rib of History," and he seems generally more intimidating and exotic to the speaker (45).

subordination of the written word to economic need. Nostalgia, on my view, opens these questions, these possibilities. It registers something once had and something changed or lost. What we infer about the meaning of that loss or change is up to us. Sometimes, of course, poets or writers infer for us. But Shahid generally does not. At most, we can confidently say that he believes Urdu to be in a bad way. But Urdu *is* in a bad way in postcolonial India. He certainly does not offer any convenient idea of what return would look like: even if the butcher now said another couplet, the awkwardness has happened. And in any case, the poem does not seem particularly to blame the butcher for, say, ignoring the speaker's attempt at friendliness.

Let us return for aid to our phenomenology of the poem's nostalgia. When the émigré arrives on the scene, he carries not a determinate desire in his mind, but the whole of an indeterminate past in his body. Because it is carried in the body, the past irrupts into consciousness only unpredictably. Any disappointment, it seems, can turn into a nostalgic disappointment—say, an awkwardly terminated exchange of ribs and poetry. When that happens, "a *double world* is at stake…a world at once phenomenally present but at the same time spooked by the world superimposed upon those appearances" (Trigg 183). There is, on the one hand, the mundane pleasantries of a polite sale, and, on the other hand, some broader sense of bygone courtesy. These worlds are not sharply distinct. They bleed together. "The movement of nostalgia is one of a *seeping* orientation" (Trigg 185).

But the seeping of past into present comes at a cost: the body through which the past seeps recedes from any shareable present. The butcher, in principle, shares the mundane pleasantries, but "courtesy" is a secondary frame, brought by the customer. As Tageldin's reading shows, the butcher is unlikely to care much about that frame (an apathy which, arguably, brings the frame about in the first place). The customer's retreat from involvement in the world

is signaled most clearly by the poem's culminating lack of closure. With that open-ended break in continuity, we enter more or less unambiguously "the atemporality of the nostalgic object" (Trigg 176). We find ourselves dealing not with this or that moment, but with eras, as per Hart's observation that nostalgic time is "aeonic" (406).

The customer's recession from involvement, moreover, entails not just forgetting the present, but rejecting it, or at least some aspect of it. It seems that a world where courtesy is disrupted is not a world where the customer can really live—Tageldin would say "belong." The task of nostalgia criticism, as I understand it, requires examining this rejection (and the "aeonic" sense of the past that shapes it). Crucially, it does not entirely evade the present. The doubled world of nostalgia requires that the present provoke the body's sense of the past, which means that what is at issue is as much a matter of similarity as dissimilarity. A wholly dissimilar world might provoke despair, but not nostalgia.

What, though, is similar, and what dissimilar? More importantly, to what? To this last question, Tageldin would say that belonging and being at home provide the relevant contrast. For his part, Bruce King suggests an imagined Muslim cultural unity in Mughal Delhi. To make things yet more complicated, I appended above an even earlier yearning to the list of options. Deciding which, if any, of them to affirm requires returning to the text.

So we arrive at the point where "change" clutters the present. The polysemy of change explodes in any number of directions. Perhaps the economics of material exchange clutters an aesthete's idealization or postcolonial forms of life supersede precolonial ones. Maybe capitalist modes of exchange disrupt less alienated forms of commerce or, as Tageldin suggests, migration uproots native. Or perhaps the distinctive temporalities of elite Indo-Muslim cultural life have been subordinated to the "homogeneous, empty time" of the nation (B. Anderson 26). The image

of a "clutter[ed]…moment of courtesy" might even suggest the need for housekeeping in the realm of politeness, as if Shahid just wants clean courtesies. It might also suggest the desire for an eternal such moment. If we are inclined to ask which one Shahid means, and find ourselves concluding, say, that he refuses to choose, we should ask why we assume he means anything at all on that front. Refusals only exist in the context of a demand. But who made the demand if not we? Did Shahid invite the demand and then refuse it, as for example John Ashbery invites readers to find meaning only to thwart their attempts?

Nostalgia is ambiguous. Dylan Trigg points to "the elusive quality of the nostalgic object: not reducible to a single thing, yet able to permeate singular things" (200). Trigg, though, is writing a book on place. We are reading a poem, and that draws attention to a new nostalgic dimension. Not only is nostalgia ambiguous with respect to the "things" it desires, but also with respect to the frames that bring them into focus. Our bodies do not just know the past from direct experience, but also from inculcated cultural memory; there are ways that poetry, for example, can train us in our longing and our belonging. Hence the overlapping of Tageldin's migrant memory, King's precolonial memory, and my suggested ghazal-generic memory. Hence also the proliferation of interpretive frames mentioned in the last paragraph. These arrive when we try to make sense of nostalgia after the fact, to narrativize it into a kind of historiography.

We can also note that to want to remember something is to find a hole in the past that needs filling. To be nostalgic, however, is generally to find the past a plenitude. The figure of the Ghalib couplet is not the figure of something that needs remembering (or even something remembered—the force of the poem and its nostalgia does not require that Ghalib couplets have been rhymed in the past—the poem says no such thing). It is the figure of a kind of familiarity that feels broken, which it is. What nostalgia offers writer and reader of "A Butcher" is a chance

to raise that brokenness to view without needing to commit to any particular mode of action that immediately rectifies it or explains it away. Tageldin does no justice to her own reading when she suggests that what the nostalgic wants is "a return to a pre-colonial past in a postcolonial future" (255). What is at issue in the poem is precisely what we could mean when we name the "precolonial past," as well as whether and to what extent we might ever have something worth calling "the same" in the future. Sameness, outside of metaphysics and absolutist commands, remains indefinitely open to questioning, particularly when it is something we are learning or seeking (the foreign language learner, for example, can never say ahead of time when her pronunciation will be met with by the instructor as acceptably the same). The nostalgic too may not know which roads lead out of nostalgia, some by going what may look like forward others back.

The rest of this chapter will explore how Shahid's later poetry begins to take less and less seriously the certainty of the direction of its nostalgia. That is to say, it leaves behind these particular scenes of postcards and disappointed exchanges, which remain concerned at least nominally with what the past looked like. As time goes on, Shahid instead begins to take nostalgia as an end in itself, as an aesthetic practice to be refined and practiced, still with its eyes on the ethical and political possibilities opened up in these early poems, but now of broader and at the same time more urgent scope.

3.3 GENERIC NOSTALGIA

As a poem like "Postcard from Kashmir" recedes into black and white obscurity, it leaves us with a problem: how to sustain this feeling long enough to do something with it. It sets the mood, but it hardly sets the scene. Its world is stripped bare, leaving little beyond a self abstractly engaging the fissure that gives it feeling. The distance between two identical words—"this" and

"this"—leaves Shahid with relatively little space in which to work if he wants to continue to explore this poetic avenue. But, as we see in "A Butcher" and throughout *The Half-Inch Himalayas*, the feeling nags with an ethical demand that cannot be tossed aside as an accomplished fact.

"A Nostalgist's Map of America" sits at the center of Shahid's next volume, giving it its title and him a chance to expand the sentiment of his earlier poems on a grander scale, both geographically and thematically. It also introduces a formal innovation that will become a central feature of his subsequent poetry: deeply interwoven allusion. Equally important for my argument, it illustrates key generic features of traditionally nostalgic poems that will help situate later innovations in Shahid's career within a broad history of nostalgic techniques. I use the word "traditional" advisedly here. Shahid's poems are not quaint, nor are they particularly reminiscent of some other body of poetry. But they do participate in a tradition of nostalgic trope-formation that extends back to an 18th century development in English poetry that Aaron Santesso describes as the rise of the "nostalgia poem." Although they were not called such, these poems were the first to deploy a set of now-cliché images, such as the childhood home, the countryside, and schooldays to evoke a particular feeling of shared longing. The specifics of that development interest me little here, but the insights and vocabulary Santesso develops to characterize those works will prove useful in understanding aspects of Shahid's poetry which are at the fore in "A Nostalgists's Map of America."

Santesso first reminds us of a useful distinction between an "intimately personal longing for the past" and "an impersonal, highly literary mode of idealization responding first and foremost to concerns of the present" (13). The latter, generic nostalgia is what literature and the arts generally give us. I have already discussed how self-conscious and abstracted "Postcard

from Kashmir" is, but with "A Nostalgist's Map of America," we reach a new level of traditionalism that must be accounted for in its own right. According to Santesso, to deal with nostalgia poetry we must shift from the search for nostalgia in "the images within the poem" to "the actual process of composing nostalgic poetry" (23). Eighteenth century nostalgia was inchoate and uncertain, open to definitional contestation. The word nostalgia itself was not yet well-codified, known only within medical circles and likely not on the minds of the poets inventing what would become its genre. Even were one to agree about what this emotion was, the variability of its object would prove troublesome. As Santesso asks on behalf of his poets, "How does one work with 'nostalgia' when one reader's nostalgia might center around a childhood in the country, another around an early adulthood in the city, and a third's around a nobly primitive way of life he has never directly experienced?" (24). Eighteenth-century poets attempted to navigate this dilemma by developing a new genre (the nostalgia poem) through a process of "tropic change" that begins with elements of the recently worn-out genres of pastoral and elegy and makes them its own, turning nostalgia into "a kind of trope machine" (26).

What I want to borrow from this conception of generic nostalgia is the idea that nostalgia is something primarily worked through and realized in a pre-existing language. Bringing the discussion to the poetry emerging out of post-Independence India, I argue that we find a new form of nostalgia that is generic in precisely the above sense even as it leaves behind the eighteenth-century poet's reader-centered concern with impersonal universality. This nostalgia poetry, of which Shahid's is paradigmatic, works within existing generic and tropic frameworks, but is not satisfied with their adequacy. It responds to personal and social concerns, but it is not a mere expression of those concerns. These poets are unsatisfied with any "realistic" description of their world or their emotions, for they cannot take for granted which languages or generic

traditions are available for their use. Their peculiar situation in postcolonial modernity brings the questions of language and tradition to the foreground and they make them foundational for their poetry. All of them make use of a poetics of return that locates in concrete linguistic form the affective and memorial material that will allow them to realize their nostalgia and attend to the various crises they find in the world around them.

Shahid, however, is less interested in "formulat[ing] a theory about the workings of the human mind" than Gray and his peers were (Santesso 65). Instead, he takes a more experiential/experimental route that presupposes a loose version of such a theory as its starting point. What he does is use tropes to create an emotional space for experimenting with various ways of connecting with the world. He can use even a set of trite images, by latching onto the received emotional impetus behind them, to array an affective world that then gives him enough poetic room to work in without presupposing a direct correspondence with the world. That is to say, in evading realist engagement with the world, he forces himself to create a new domain in which to experiment. That domain is nostalgia, and it arises at least initially within the frame that gave him nostalgia in the first place: received cliché and generic constraint.

To say that his nostalgia trades in tradition, however, is not to say that it works in only one. As we shall see throughout this chapter, he is especially fond of two: a "desperate" strain of big emotions in American poetry exemplified by Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, and the yearning melancholy of the Persian and Urdu ghazal. But his work also draws from such diverse founts as Hindu devotionalism and Greek mythology. My reference to tradition, however, is not meant to name this latter aspect of Shahid's work. By tradition I mean something closer to an overlapping set of genres, what Shahid refers to in the context of the ghazal as its "profound and complex cultural unity" (*Ravishing DisUnities* 2). That is to say, the horizon within which an

image or phrase, simply by virtue of its utterance, can evoke a mood, without the need for discursive elaboration or narrative development. Unlike the poets in Chapter 2, Shahid is not particularly interested in subverting or disrupting traditions, but rather mobilizing, translating, and exploring them. *Kashmiriyat*, an aesthetic ethos of being Kashmiri that draws heavily on images of despoilation, loss, and past communal harmony, is perhaps the largest and most politically relevant tradition within which Shahid's poetry might be read.[61] But we are in danger of getting ahead of ourselves.

Let us turn to "A Nostalgist's Map of America" to ground this discussion. Its conceit is reminiscence—a road trip remembered between two friends. The season is summer, a time of rich nostalgic resonance in the American imagination, especially when framed, as in "A Nostalgist's Map of America," by the end of school. The trip leads naturally enough "back to … // your boyhood town." And the radio plays the very paradigm of nostalgia: "It must have been a disco hit, / one whose singer no one recalls" (36). What could be more fittingly American and nostalgic than a one-hit wonder—that staple of generational knowledge[62]—from the most stereotypically dated genre of American music, played while on a summer road trip of male bonding, after the last year of school, on a return to a boyhood home?

It is incredible that the poem succeeds, not despite its clichés, but because of them. What Shahid wants to engage in writing the poem is something quite specific and personal: his friend's death from AIDS at the height of its crisis in the 1980's and what his own poetry has to offer in

[61] For an in-depth discussion of *Kashmiriyat*, see Chitralekha Zutshi's two books, *Languages of Belonging* (particularly the second chapter, "Mulk-i-Kashmir: History, Memory, and Representation") and *Kashmir's Contested Pasts*

[62] The very concept of a "generation" is constituted in and through nostalgia, as Fred Davis has shown (111-115).

response.[63] What the poem actually mentions, though, is far less topical and certainly not "engaged" in some political sense of the word à la Sartre. Arguably, the poem gains from the contextual information something it could have supplied more directly, but what interests me is not how successful the poem is as a testimony to its time or topic, but how Shahid uses it to experiment with techniques for engaging, managing, and inhabiting nostalgic affect formally.

My cue in reading this poem comes from its final image. After priming himself and his readers in the generically nostalgic first half, the poem turns to a resonant moment after Shahid hangs up the phone, having just been informed of his friend's imminent death. After the conversation ends, Shahid continues talking to his friend. "I kept speaking to you / after I hung up, my voice the quickest / mail, a cracked disc with many endings, // each false." We are given three such endings, each a play on a search for Evanescence introduced in the flashback that opened the poem. The last ending, "the least false," is also the most meta-poetic,

> "You said each month you need
> new blood. Please forgive me, Phil, but I thought
> of your pain as a formal feeling, one
> useful for the letting go, your transfusions
>
> mere wings to me, the push of numerous
> hummingbirds, souvenirs of Evanescence
> seen disappearing down a route of veins
> in an electric rush of cochineal."

The phrase "formal feeling" is telling. On the one hand, it refers superficially to the distant

[63] Shahid discusses the background of the poem in "Agha Shahid Ali: Calligraphy of Coils."

stance Shahid takes toward the pain. But it also refers, on the other hand, to the fact that feeling has form. It does not exist independently in some Cartesian theater. Nor does it emerge purely out of raw sensation in unmediated contact with objects themselves. Feeling is modal.[64] It is a process. And as such it requires routes of habituation, forms for it to enter mental life and conscious reflection. Each of these endings are ways for Shahid to test out affective forms and the qualities that they enable him to pursue. Just as in "Postcard from Kashmir," here too the poem ends with disappearance, an image receding away. But unlike in the former poem, the image is one that Shahid has built up throughout the poem as durationally inhabitable. To understand this, we must return to its beginning.

The clichés of "A Nostalgist's Map of America" are generic enough to establish nostalgia as the poem's "mood," i.e., as a feeling that has come unmoored from any particular site of sensation and seems to pervade the world at hand.[65] It is precisely their generic quality that allows such unmooring to act in the background as Shahid's foregrounded manipulation of new tropes establishes the poem's distinctive patterns of thought and feeling. The most prominent of those patterns come from the echoes of Emily Dickinson throughout the poem. She first appears in the opening lines, "The trees were soon hushed in the resonance of darkest emerald" (118), which echo the "Resonance of Emerald—/ A Rush of Cochineal—" from Dickinson's "A Route of Evanescence."[66] But what draws her into focus and marks her full entrance into the affective

[64] For further discussion of how feelings are best captured not in terms of stasis, but of process, see Altieri's discussion of "adverbial" approaches to affect (especially pages 9-14).
[65] Heidegger is the most famous of the early theorists of mood (see, for example, *Being and Time* 126-133), but Altieri's discussion of it (53-71) offers a specifically aesthetic approach that influences my discussion here.
[66] Dickinson's "A Route of Evanescence" is included as epigraph to the poem in Shahid's collected poems, *The Veiled Suite*. In *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, her poem serves as the

terrain of the poem is a coincidence of world and image:

> "A hummingbird,"
> I said, after a sharp turn, then pointed
> to the wheel, still revolving in your hand.
>
> I gave Emily Dickinson to you then,
> line after line, complete from heart. (118)

On a dramatic level, this image is immanent to the scene. Shahid does not go searching for an image, nor is there any objective reason that would suffice to explain the image's arrival. It is simply part and parcel of this world's disclosure. The image itself is reversed. Where the "revolving Wheel" evokes for Dickinson a hummingbird's whirl of color, the hummingbird here emerges from the steering wheel's revolutions. But out of the image is born a line of possibility. Not only can he recite Dickinson "complete from heart," but he can and does go "further." He invites Phil—the friend at the center of the poem—to join him in an extension of the poetic fancy. "Let's pretend your city // is Evanescence—There has to be one— / in Pennsylvania— And that some day— / the Bird will carry—my letters—to you— / from Tunis—or Casablanca— the mail // an easy night's ride—from North Africa."

This would be interesting in itself for its suggestion that an unconscious association, born of a fleeting mood, could give rise to patterns of thought made available by direct quotation, which then condition new possibilities for improvisation.[67] But "A Nostalgist's Map of America"

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epigraph to the second section of the volume, of which "A Nostalgist's Map of America" is the first poem.

[67] Shahid himself appeals to the metaphor of musical improvisation in introducing the ghazal form and his relationship to it. See his Introduction to *Ravishing DisUnities* (13).

is not content with such a banal observation about form, tradition, and thought. For it turns out that none of this may have happened. “I’m making this up,” Shahid admits; “but since you / were there, none of it’s a lie.” The admission alone is curious enough, but he follows it up with a remarkable, now seemingly non-sensical question, “How did I / go on?” This of course reorients us and forces us to consider important second-order identifications involved in this telling of the story. But it also reasserts the proliferating power of the poetic form. Not only was the image enough to start the conversation going in the first place, but it is enough to carry it forward *and keep it meaningfully “true”* well past the point where it has confronted its complete lack of direct, factual connection to the world. Although it can certainly be described as a fantastic flight from reality in light of the sad news to come later in the poem, the symptomatic reading seems reductive. Shahid has not abandoned truth entirely, just a certain understanding of it as the factual correspondence of propositions to the world.

His continued commitment to truth and, for that matter, to ethics comes to the fore in the second half of the poem. We have already seen that Shahid’s reaction to the fateful phone call telling him of Phil’s condition turns his voice into a “cracked disc with many endings, / each false.” We are now prepared to wrestle more directly with that “falsity.” As the music metaphor implies, to speak falsely is not to lie. Lying requires intentionality, but Shahid speaks unwittingly. His voice skips, repeats, and fragments itself despite the fact that its reason for speaking—the conversation—has long since passed. What it continues, however, is not a matter of random chance. It repeats the patterns of the (false) memory with which the poem opens, each end speaking to the continued vitality of Evanescence, both as subject and form of conversation. The first two endings place Shahid himself “in” Evanescence, whether constructed or found. The third, the “least false,” sees the return of the hummingbirds, now coming *from* Evanescence and

pushing forth into the poet's future.

At this point, we confront the ethical problem of the poem. Shahid himself apologizes for thinking this way. And the elaboration of a fantastic relationship to a dying man, "one useful for the letting go," does not immediately reassure his readers. It is a problem that will recur in more self-conscious ways later in his poetry (and in this chapter), but for now I want to stress two things. First, ethics remains a structuring feature of the poem. "A Nostalgist's Map of America" is not simply solipsistic self-address. It projects Phil as its hearer, and it does so to apologize and explain. Second, that ethical endeavor, whatever we make of its success, is a matter of finding the right form. Shahid does not already possess responsibility (as a capacity to respond) or the knowledge how to respond as some inherent feature in his subjectivity. He must test them out, experimentally, by tracing lines of nostalgic flight that, as Charles Altieri reminds us regarding feelings in general, establish values as satisfying or not in themselves, quite independently of rationalist accounts of ethical reasoning.

His experiments, moreover, do not begin *ex nihilo*. They engage forms of feeling, such as Dickinson's poetry of Evanescence, that emerge in the resonance of the feeling itself, a feeling that Shahid is able to found initially by calling up a web of generically nostalgic references. The form serves almost as an echo chamber, amplifying resonances and encouraging further lines of thought. But this tells us relatively little about any second-order evaluations Shahid might bring to bear on this project. To observe that there are satisfactions immanent to the pursuit of feelings and their "expressions" is not to suggest that there are no other value considerations. Shahid's poetry by and large is quite committed to the pursuit of an ideal that, while emerging out of his experiments with nostalgia, is not reducible to them. He often calls this ideal "fidelity." It is to fidelity that I now turn.

3.4 TRANSLATIONAL FIDELITY

"Fidelity" enters Shahid's poetry in a number of ways, but the most accessible theoretically is translation. Translation theory has a rich history of terminological rigor around the concept of fidelity. That history will enable me to tease out some of the specificity of Shahid's translational use of the term before listening for the broader resonances he gives it elsewhere in his oeuvre. Rather than tackle the largest questions of ethics and form directly, then, I propose in this section to approach those issues a bit more circumspectly by examining translation as both literary figure and literal act. The starting point for my analysis will be a curious remark Shahid makes in a poem about translation, namely that "liberty…was [his] only way of being loyal" (257). This quotation, and the context that surrounds it, grounds Shahid's understanding of fidelity—here called "loyalty"—in nostalgia, as we have come to expect. It also opens up, through its paradoxically free notion of fidelity, a non-semantic focus for translation theory. These insights will then prove useful when I return in the next section to my inquiry into (poetic) forms of nostalgia and the ethics they enable. First, though, I must put this moment of free fidelity in context.

Shahid's career undergoes a shift with *Country without a Post Office*, a 1997 volume that inaugurates the Kashmir crisis as a central theme of his work. This shift brings with it a more sustained reflection on global historical patterns, politics, and injustice. No longer can his poetry be as neatly personal as "Postcard from Kashmir." That is not to say, however, that he abandons lyricism or its ties to the personal dimensions of experience. His next volume in particular, *Rooms Are Never Finished* (2000), reintroduces his personal battles with grief as part of the frame for Kashmir in general. Now, rather than Shahid's friendship with Phil, it is his late mother that dominates the emotional landscape. Having just died of the same brain cancer that would

shortly take Shahid's life, Shahid's mother looms over the poems in this volume even more than did Phil before. "*My mother / is my poem*," says Shahid in exasperation (248, emphasis original). Such a sentiment brings into sharp focus the existential import of his poetry. In the last section, I argued that "A Nostalgist's Map of America" provided a similar outlet for Shahid to work through his relationship to another, but with *Rooms Are Never Finished*, the process enters his poetry on a much more explicit, figural level. And in "Summers of Translation," Shahid turns to translation as a new way of figuring that relationship.

"Summers of Translation" is the third poem in a sequence dedicated to his mother's memory, imagining grief on a grand cosmic scale as he bears her body back from Amherst, where she died, to Kashmir; hence the title of the sequence: "From Amherst to Kashmir." In "Summers of Translation," Shahid recalls translating Urdu poems by Faiz Ahmad Faiz into English with her. Summers past come rushing back as he picks up a poem—aptly titled "Memory"—which they had read but failed to translate. He decides to tackle it afresh. The result provides the fifth poem of "From Amherst to Kashmir." Before we get there, however, Shahid contextualizes and introduces his queer notion of fidelity,

> It was '89, the stones were not far, signs of change
> everywhere (Kashmir would soon be in literal
> flames). Well, our dawns were so perfectly set to arrange
>
> our evenings in color that liberty with each ghazal
> was my only way of being loyal to any original . . . (257, ellipsis original)

Translation thus enters the picture through nostalgia, which is to say, under the guise of a larger

history and ethics.[68] Because it is figured in translation, though, Shahid can avoid committing himself (or my reading of him) to immediately explicating what that history and ethics are. Let us attend, instead, to the specific loyalties and liberties of the translation at hand.

Even before comparing it to the original, we are faced with one obvious liberty that Shahid has taken with the material: he has appropriated it to a new context. By plopping it down in the middle of his own poem sequence, he has radically altered the possibilities of its reception. In particular, the last stanza takes on an entirely new valence when juxtaposed with Shahid's remarks on fidelity:

> Memory's placed its hand so on Time's face, touched it
> so caressingly that although it's still our
> parting's morning, it's as if night's come, bringing
> you to my bare arms. (263)

One cannot help but see the parallel between this stanza's morning anticipation of night and the sunrise anticipation of sunset in "Summers of Memory." Yet the values are reversed. Whereas in "Summers of Translation" the sunset is disastrous, the night for Faiz is a time of hope.

The reversal results from a change in the poem's temporality. Faiz's poem, as translated by Shahid, takes place in the present. Rather than remembering what it was like when loss was only a possibility, here the poet has already lost; he finds himself in "[d]esolation's desert." For Shahid, his mother has died, and this poem speaks to her. "Memory" offers some solace in a world where grief is no longer a future anterior, but a present reality. That is to say, both his memory and the poem called "Memory" give him hope. Such appropriation is the first liberty.

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[68] Peter Fritzsche offers a particularly succinct treatment of the historical development of nostalgia and its unique manner of bridging the personal/social and memory/history divides.

The second liberty follows almost immediately from the first. The elaborate wordplay at the end of "Summers of Translation" weaves the poem into Shahid's own life's text: "On Memory's mantle—where summers may truly shine—/ all, as never before, is nothing but translation" (259). Beyond simply recontextualizing the poem, therefore, Shahid weaves "Memory" into ontology itself—*all* is "nothing but translation."

Before parsing what may seem to be the nihilism of this last statement, I want to address one more set of liberties in Shahid's "Memory": its simultaneous personalization and abstraction. A simple gesture—giving the speaker an "I" with which to speak—makes the poem more personal and concrete. But even as it concretizes, the translation also abstracts. Whereas Faiz only describes the location of some blooming roses—i.e., *beneath* the grass and dust of distance ("dūrī ke khas-o-khāk *tale,*" emphasis added)—Shahid gives agency to the landscape; the "grass and dust of distance *have let* this / desert bloom with your roses" (emphasis added).[69] Likewise, in the stanza I quoted above, Shahid personifies not only Memory, but also Time (capitalized, despite Urdu's lack of such typographical distinction). In fact, time only appears in the Urdu in the form a straightforward adverb (or, more precisely, adverbial phrase): "is waqt," i.e., "at this time," "now." Another translation of the same lines might run, "your memory now has touched [my] heart's cheek" ("rakhā hai / dil ke rukhsār pe is waqt teri yād ne hāth"). For Faiz, Time has no face. Memory is specific. And the dust just sits there. But Shahid, by bringing these features to life, takes the poem to new heights of philosophical abstraction and away from the specificity of an isolated night of loneliness.

What do these four liberties—recontextualizing, ontologizing, personalizing, and

[69] For the original and an alternative to Shahid's translation and my own ad hoc renderings, see Faiz 57-58.

abstracting—tell us about Shahid's fidelity? They tell us first of all that it is situated. Shahid is uninterested in the abstract principles of correspondence that would determine whether or not a translation is "faithful." That is to say that his translation theory is not "instrumental," as Lawrence Venuti would put it.[70] Venuti distinguishes between two basic models of translation: instrumental and hermeneutic. The former assumes that there exists an "invariant" in original texts that translators can instrumentalize the receiving language to preserve and convey. The latter model, by contrast, de-emphasizes invariance and draws attention to the interpretive work inherent in translation. Valid possibilities for translation explode in the hermeneutic model where the instrumental model pares down available strategies until there is only a particular ideal, which would best convey the invariant. That does not mean that the hermeneutic model eschews value judgments. On the contrary. The criteria for judgment simply shift from preservation of invariance to other modes of valuation, such as political or other consequentialisms wherein judgment is based on the effects translations have on the receiving culture. Shahid's chosen terminology—including words like "faithful" and "free"—hews most closely to the instrumental model, focusing on the degree to which a translation has strayed from the invariant core of the original. But when Shahid says that "liberty…was [his] only way of being loyal," it throws a wrench in that system.

I want to emphasize that it is not simply that Shahid believes in two kinds of invariant—one toward which his loyalty strives and one away from which his liberty moves. Such distinctions are familiar enough in the history of Western translation theory with its share of binary fidelities. St. Jerome, for example, initiates one such tradition, still popular today, of

[70] For Venuti's discussion of the development of an "intstrumental model" of language use, see his article on Saint Jerome's translation theory, which guides the following discussion.

distinguishing between sense-for-sense and word-for-word translation. But Shahid's freedoms are not deeper accuracies, nor do they claim, as Jerome does, to inform. In fact, Jerome's entire binaristic premise proves quite unstable, so even if Shahid did want to claim it, it would do little explanatory good. My contention is that his fidelity is a particular mode of affective engagement, not an epistemic relationship between source and target text. That affective relationship, however, requires my paying a bit more attention to epistemic matters in order to elucidate, particularly with regard to the notion of *cliché.*

For a poet who, as I argue above, uses cliché with such frequency (and ability), Shahid remarks curiously often in his critical writings of its danger, and of translation's salvific role in evading it. He sells the (for him) Urdu ghazal form to American poets by emphasizing its inherent capacity for making new the trite rhyme:

> Through ghazals, English can again employ full rhymes, even the most cliché-ridden, without apology or embarrassment because the *radif* [a refrain that immediately follows the rhyme] enables the rhyme to lose, through a transparent masking, its strained and clichéd element.; the *qafia* [the rhyme] is made transparently invisible. What an incredible gift: all those rhymes one thought could never be used again. (*Ravishing DisUnities* 11)

And, in claiming that singer Begum Akhtar "translates" (*Rebel's Silhouette* ix) poems by Faiz into song, he revels in how she does so "in a tantalizingly unclichéd Bhairavi" (xxv), which is to say a typical *raga* used un-stereotypically. Finally, he remarks of a problem he faced when he wrote a poem from *Nostalgist's Map of America,* namely how to "*translate*" a singular moment of experience (xxiv). His solution: find another singular moment, and "in that untranslatable fraction of time, [he] did manage a translation by pointing out its impossibility" (xxv). The above

three examples share not only a concern with singularity and freedom from the mundane grips of cliché, but also a rather free use of the word translation. First, he offers a poetic form in translation; then, a sung poem; and finally, a moment captured in words. The context of the latter two examples is also crucial. They are included in his introduction to his own translation of Faiz, where ostensibly they elucidate the method and ideal of his translation, which, he reiterates, involves "moments (of fidelity, I insist) when I am unfaithful" (xxiii).

Both the singularizing escape from cliché and the expansive sense of translation are crucial, I argue, to Shahid's notion of fidelity. He does not make two "texts" correspond, but puts two experiences in dialogue. Shahid's evasion of cliché is an escape from language conceived as code, so language means something quite different for him than it does for epistemically focused translation theories.[71] The publicness of language is necessary, in general and for Shahid in particular. The availability Shahid seeks for his singular experience, however, is not the same as finding the right linguistic slot to slide his experience into. As with the neatness of the postcard that would make Kashmir "available," there are linguistic trivialities that offer easy publication for a neat little version of his experience. That is not his goal. Partly this is an affective and aesthetic claim, of course. But there is also perhaps a political dimension. Those trivialities, those clichés are not too far from the colonial-bureaucratic emptiness of "English" as an imperial educational program—cf. what Gayatri Spivak calls "a sort of with-it translatese" that suppresses the "rhetoricity" of languages in favor of a standardized, insipid neutrality that makes the words of "a woman in Palestine…resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan"

[71] Even when such translation theories focus on untranslatability because code conceptions of language are insufficient, the very idea of insufficiency presupposes that the ideal translation captures what can be *known* about the original. That is to say, they accept the terms of debate offered by codes and then reject all existing code-rules as insufficient.

("Politics" 315).

Chinua Achebe's attack on the notion of the "native speaker" will help explicate this point. Achebe is concerned with how African writers use English and whether they can use it successfully for creative writing. They can, he says, but not by writing "like a native speaker" (62). The evidence he provides is initially rather strange. He quotes a passage from his own novel, *Arrow of God*, and then rewrites it "like a native speaker." Needless to say, the latter is markedly less interesting than the former. For Achebe, the native speaker is not an artistic speaker, a *creative* writer. He is a caricature of colonial mimicry, deferential and towing as tightly as possible the party line of the "language." Of course, at this point, the quotation marks become necessary, as actually existing language must necessarily exceed the bounds of such controlled banality in its everyday use, much less in the artistic work of a postcolonial writer.

At first, it seems strange to equate a language (even a dialect or other linguistic subset) with bad writing. One should be able to blow such a straw man over with ease, simply by having any number of "actual" native speakers rewrite Achebe's paragraph in more interesting prose. And yet, the theme comes up with such frequency, especially in ethically or politically aware translation theory, that it cannot be what it seems. I take a similar point to be entailed in Gayatri Spivak's dismissal of the "with-it translatese" that makes a woman writer from Palestine indistinguishable from a Taiwanese man in the feel of their prose (315). Venuti's remarks on the dangers of "domesticating" translations are even more in Achebe's vein, since what they are being domesticated *into* is "the most invisible: the current standard dialect" (*Scandals* 20). Each of these thinkers has their own aim in naming such a language, and I am not suggesting that Shahid's translation style is in perfect agreement with any of them. But he does, like them, find the problem rooted in deeper historical and political concerns, for he notes an awareness "that

subcontinental English needed renewal and reworking, *translation* even, before I and other poets could use it to meet the demands of a 'hybrid' cultural situation. But it was mine, ours" (*Rebel's Silhouette* xii, emphasis original). Where I think Shahid has something to offer this conversation is in his refusal to name the other language, or more precisely in his thinking translation in terms that do not fit either epistemically driven code models of language or even as definable styles. This is why it is so significant that his list of what can be "translated" is so capacious.

It is also no accident that Shahid's list of translations involves both adaptation (*for*—but not *between*—mediums) and singularization. These two are actually related, insofar as the parenthetical distinction I made between adaptation "for" a medium and adaptation "between" mediums is related to the process of making something singularly suited to its context. To adapt one medium to another would perhaps be something like humming a poem, whereas adapting it to the medium is what Begum Akhtar does—instantiate the poem *in* song. Some translators view their work in the latter terms, as an adaptation from one language-medium to another. Shahid seems to think of his translation in different terms.

What a poem *is* for him is not a well-defined text, but a sensuous movement, or rather a framework for enabling such movement. Translating it entails not recreating that movement as an "invariant," but searching for a way that the movement itself opens onto another language. To some degree, this rather fanciful or mystical way of describing the phenomenon will have to do for now; it will be clarified somewhat by my attention to form—the ghazal form in particular—in later sections. But I do want to observe that what he is being true to in each case is his own nostalgic relationship with the original. Even the Begum Akhtar example is crucially nostalgic, since she has died when he writes this, already becoming a resonant figure for the entire past that was lost with her. Shahid thus must be positioned in opposition to Lawrence Venuti's bracketing

of the source culture-receiving culture relationship in favor of attending more sensitively to the translation's place in the receiving culture alone. Shahid resolutely sees the ethics emerging out of the original, not the translating language. Before moving on to a broader analysis of Shahid's fidelity outside translation, two more thinkers can help clarify Shahid's translational fidelity: Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida, both of whom try to break free from the epistemic grips of content-translation, but whose philosophies of translation differ from Shahid's in telling ways.

For Benjamin, as for Shahid, the literary work's "essential quality is not statement or the imparting of information" (69). That would result, in Benjamin's pithy phrasing, in an epistemically driven translation offering nothing more than an "inaccurate transmission of an inessential content" (70). Instead, translation should give a literal after-life to the text. While on the surface, this may seem compatible with my suggestion that Shahid wants to continue the movement of the original in his translation, in fact what interests Benjamin is quite different. Benjamin's translation, unlike Shahid's, is entirely impersonal, decidedly disinterested in its reader and presumably not too concerned with its translator either. What interests it is a mystical unity underlying any and all languages, "pure language" as Benjamin dubs it: "all suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole—an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language" (74). This may require that the translator abandon the oppressive standard dialect, as Shahid or Achebe wish. "The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue" (81). This, however, is for quite a different reason. Whereas Benjamin's translation strives for the universal and "suprahistorical," which for him is "vouchsafed to Holy Writ alone," Shahid looks for the utterly

unrepeatable, something so singular that he can say of it, "I, Shahid, only am escaped to tell thee / God sobs in my arms. Call me Ishmael tonight" (193). While a detailed analysis of the religious work of Benjamin's and Shahid's translation theories is beyond the scope of this chapter, the surface difference is striking. Shahid's position makes sense, given his nostalgic poetics, since loss and unrepeatability would be basic requirements for nostalgic yearning. But beyond that obvious fact, it is worth stressing that when Shahid writes that "all, as never before, is nothing but translation" (*Veiled Suite* 259), he reminds us that translation is born of a what might seem a permanent loss and that there is no stable meaning—within, above or beyond language—that could be the target for or vital impetus behind translation. I want to stress that it only seems a loss, since it is not possible to pin down what is lost, the original against which the translation is a disappointment is created in the comparison. The consequence is that translation must live up not to originals or mysticisms, but to the relationship-in-loss that one experiences *as* the "original" through its translation.

The always-already loss of translation immediately suggests Jacques Derrida, a philosopher who can insist paradoxically that "anyone should be able to declare under oath: I have only one language and it is not mine" (25). This includes so-called multilinguals. Derrida, a bit like Benjamin, works with a privileged concept of language-as-such over and against the banal multiplicity of languages in use. In his *Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin*, Derrida begins with the premiss that distinctions between dialects, languages, and idioms are forced and artificial. Differentiation requires a fixed center around which a language (or dialect) is defined, a center that people can fight over and try to appropriate, but which, as center, can only ever remain the source of conflict not resolution. By contrast, Derrida believes, we can begin to have an ethical linguistic relationship with each other only by owning up to the fact that

we do not control language, that we only participate in it. In a sense, we must approach language as something we have always-already lost. For Derrida, this loss is literal and biographical—as an Algerian Jew, Derrida's French citizenship was stolen, and for him this was also a loss of the French language, as well as a realization that he never had it; yet it is the language that he speaks. But his historical example signifies more than its context. One never has the language which one speaks, because it has always already been taken away.

Now, how does Derrida's loss differ from Shahid's? Shahid, like Derrida is a "native speaker" of a language that seems unable to accept him as "native." And yet, I have been discussing Shahid's translation strategy as appropriative and recontextualizing. Derrida, by contrast, talks of "de-propriation" (64). This strikes me as more than a mere terminological difference. For Shahid, loss—rehearsed as nostalgia—is his personal connection to the universal. The universal arise precisely through its particular instantiation in loss. "All…is nothing but translation," he discovers in translating. For Derrida, claiming the language as one's own is always to reinstantiate the exclusionary logic that engendered the loss in the first place (which, as I have already noted, is not a historical "first place" but an always-already condition of human politics). Shahid might twist Derrida's oath: "There is only one language; it is mine." The great irony would be that Shahid would have believed he remained true to Derrida's ethical impulse in thus inverting his claim. In order to clarify how that would work, we must turn to larger questions. What precisely does Shahid's appropriation earn him ethically and why must he locate it in nostalgia broadly, rather than translation narrowly?

3.5 AESTHETIC EXERCISES

So far the argument I have been pursuing has attempted to establish, first, the insufficiency of prevailing nostalgia discourses for approaching Shahid and, second, the need to develop an

alternative approach centered around form and the manipulation of generic conventions. Both arguments entail a corollary claim that we need to account for the affective dimension of poetry in general, and Shahid's nostalgia in particular. The motivation for this lies at least partly in Shahid's frequent tying together of nostalgic affect, poetic production, and ethical wrestling. Noting the large size of the problem posed by this trio, the preceding section narrowed the domain of inquiry artificially (but productively and in a manner suggested by Shahid's own vocabulary) to translational fidelity, a pursuit that exposes key features of Shahid's ethics (such as a curious kind of appropriation) and their ties to a particular form of poetic nostalgia. But I have now reached a point in my argument where I must speak more generally about my use of the word "ethics" and the relationship I see it taking to Shahid's work in general, not simply in translation. This brings the chapter to the core of its ethical theory.

My conception of ethics here draws on two quite different ideas of how a text can function ethically. The first is a strand of thought beginning with Pierre Hadot's reading of ancient European philosophy, traveling through Michel Foucault, and arriving most recently in the work of literary scholars such as Gabriel Trop. This sees the text as what Hadot calls a "spiritual exercise." The second comes out of the work of Charles Altieri, following Kant, who sees the text not as typical, but as exemplary expression, i.e., as proposing a new frame of understanding. My argument will be that we ought to read Shahid somewhere between these two extremes, or perhaps more accurately as exploring the tension between them.

Michel Foucault's engagement with the history of sexuality in Europe brought him to the realization that his broader goal, "a history of truth," "was a matter of analyzing, not behaviors or ideas, nor societies and their 'ideologies,' but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought—and the *practices* on the basis of which these

problematizations are formed" (11). Put more concretely in the context of his work on sexuality, which it turns out is actually work on ethics, Foucault is not concerned with what he calls "moral codes" (25), nor with the "morality of behaviors," i.e., society's success in sticking to those codes (26); rather, he turns to "what might be called a history of 'ethics' and 'ascetics,' understood as a history of the forms of moral subjectivation and of the practices of the self that are meant to ensure it" (29). This is precisely the sense in which I wish to take "ethics," i.e., as dually structured in a set of practices and the object toward which those practices are oriented: an ethical self. For now I want to focus on the practices half of this structure, turning to what Foucault calls the "determination of the ethical substance" (26) and the "mode of subjection (mode d'assujettisement)" (27) only after we have a working sense of what kind of ethical work Shahid's poetry attempts.

The concept of ethical work, or "practices of the self," that Foucault employs originates with Pierre Hadot's work on ancient, particularly Stoic and Epicurean, philosophy. One of Hadot's central arguments is that ancient philosophy was not so concerned with elaborating coherent, consistent, and organized theories as it was in practicing what he calls "spiritual exercises." Hadot wrestles a bit with the term, and in so doing tells us quite a bit about the work he wants it to do. On the one hand, he notes that "it is no longer fashionable these days to use the word 'spiritual'" (81). But that in itself is not enough to stop him from doing so, for no other term is satisfying. "Thought" does not work because it fails to capture the role played by "imagination and sensibility" (82). He even toys with the "rather tempting expression," "ethical exercises," but finds that, too, lacking, as the kind of exercise he intends actually transforms "our

vision of the world" and not merely the way we act in it (82).[72] More precisely, the entire concept of ethics disappears in the exercise: "logic, physics, and ethics distinguish themselves from one another when one *speaks* of philosophy, but not when one *lives* it" (quoted in Davidson 25).

One of Hadot's favorite examples, the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, will help illustrate why I find the concept so helpful for thinking about Shahid's poetry. According to Hadot, a pernicious misreading of Marcus Aurelius focuses on his pessimism; that is, it draws conclusions about Marcus' emotions and the beliefs they entail from the style of his writing, particularly in such moments as this: "These foods and dishes…are only dead fish, bids and pigs; this Falernian wine is a bit of grape juice…as for sex, it is the rubbing together of pieces of gut, followed by the spasmodic secretion of a little bit of slime" (quoted in Davidson 13). But Hadot notes that this is a generic convention—not of pessimism, but of Stoicism. It is a way not of expressing, but of exercising the self so as to see the world in a particular way and thereby transform the self so as find the "inner…peace and freedom" sought by Stoicism (Davidson 14). The parallel with my earlier points about Shahid is clear: we must not ignore the *formal* premiss of the work and its relation to a practice or exercise of the self, and in so doing jump hastily to judgments about authorial psychology or attitude.

I am not the first to take up explicitly this notion of exercise for literary studies.[73] Gabriel Trop, notably, has done this in a very systematic way in his *Poetry as a Way of Life*, a book

[72] This, in fact, ends up being a source of disappointment for Hadot with respect to Foucault's work with the term. For Hadot, Foucault's notion of "care of the self" cedes ground and shrinks spiritual exercises back down to mere ethical exercises (206).

[73] Nor is the Hadot-Foucault lineage the only exercise-based approach to literature. Joshua Landy's work on literature as a means for "training" our mental "capacities" falls quite naturally into this same vein of thought.

which finds in eighteenth-century German poetry an especially fertile period of experimenting with literature quite self-consciously as a form of exercise *à la* Hadot and Foucault. The context of that book's inquiry necessarily limits its immediate applicability to a late-twentieth-century Kashmiri-American poet like Shahid. However, his work does help situate my argument within a broader literary-theoretical horizon, as well as providing useful suggestions for adapting the "spiritual exercise" concept to literary studies (to the extent at least that it has not already been adapted sufficiently with the Marcus example above). First, Trop's "aesthetic exercise" is particular rather than universal. Whereas Arnold I. Davidson sees Hadot philosophy of spiritual exercises as describing a series of "universal existential attitudes" that are embodied in different kinds of such exercise: Epicurean, Aristotelian, etc. (35), Trop finds in art's open interpretability an absence of any "pretension to transparency or univocity of purpose." Aesthetic reception (and hence aesthetic exercise) is "both culturally conditioned and particularized by any given individual" (11). This much seems true of Shahid.

Where I diverge from Trop is, however, precisely in his perception of art as primarily an act of reception, which is highlighted in the above reasoning. The aesthetic exercise is "a way of reading" (11). But what I have been describing with regard to Shahid's nostalgia is precisely a productive exercise that *yields* the poem rather than interprets it. (I believe there are reading practices that parallel this productive act, but that claim will have to wait for later). That is not to say that Shahid's nostalgic exercise is not, like Trop's aesthetic exercise, "an absorptive and attentive focus that probes, analyzes, gathers, and associates" (11). It is simply to insist that this is not in service of finding a response to the questions, "what sort of self does this text call into being, what practices of life does it invoke?" (Trop 11). Instead, Shahid's self-work *is* a kind of active self-fashioning in the vein of Hadot's "spiritual exercise" or Foucault's "care of the self"

rather than the somewhat more passive allowing oneself to *be exercised* that Trop offers.

What kind of exercise is Shahid's nostalgia then? We can break this question into an inquiry into four aspects of practice, following Foucault: "determination of ethical substance," "mode of subjection" (or "subjectivation"), "forms of elaboration," and "telos" (26-28). The ethical substance is the stuff on which an exercise works. It is what Shahid wants to change or form through his poetry. Foucault takes the example of sexual fidelity: one can define it as a constraint on physical behavior, a focusing of desire away from distractions, or an intensifying of feeling, among other options. For Shahid, we have seen that it is something closer to this latter sense. To use terminology from one of his own poems—the celebrated title poem of *The Country Without a Post Office* (1997)—it is the "heart" upon which he works. A meditation on the Kashmir crisis from afar, that particular poem follows its speaker's attempt to be "faithful" to the pain and suffering happening in a country to which he has no access (not even by mail, the title insists), especially that of a friend from whom he has not heard. The speaker apostrophizes his own heart throughout the poem: "Phantom heart, // pray he's alive;" "Phantom heart, / this is your pain. Feel it;" "Feel it, / Heart, be faithful to his mad refrain;" ending with one final, "Mad heart, be brave" (203-6). The transition from "phantom heart" to "mad heart" is not trivial. The speaker believes his heart to have materialized and become substantial over the course of the poem. His embrace of the demand—"Feel it"—brings about his being as an ethical self, a "heart." (That it is "mad" is a point to which we will return, but suffice it for the moment to remind ourselves of the de-narrativized self of "Postcard from Kashmir" and its rejection of neat identity).[74]

[74] The term "heart" thus clarifies and narrows what I have been calling more vaguely a "self," though I will not forsake the latter term, as it retains more currency in ethical discourse and

Already with the term "heart" Shahid has answered our next question, pertaining to the "mode of subjectivation," "that is, the way in which the individual establishes himself in relation to the rule and recognizes himself obliged to put it into practice" (Foucault 27). Foucault notes that one can obey a rule because one thinks it expedient (as in a social contract) or for any number of other reasons. Shahid's apostrophizing to the "heart" above suggests that he perceives a virtuous circle between a felt demand and his feeling response. Insofar as he has determined the substance of his ethical work, then, Shahid has already subjected himself to it (or perhaps found himself already subject to it—I will say later in this chapter that finds himself "implicated" in it). I will call this mode of subjectivation an affirmation of nostalgia's demanded return. Shahid must return to the feeling. He must return to Kashmir, literally or metaphorically. And in returning, the demand to return is increased, because the locus of return (the ethical substance) is internal and affective, not external and achieved.

The "forms of elaboration" that enable Shahid to pursue this ethical project are precisely the forms of his poetry. More to the point, it is form as repetition that Shahid's work most clearly evinces as the manner of his ethical work. We see this already in his "phantom heart" refrain, but it is more broadly visible in his increasing use of rhyme, refrain, and constraining structures in his poetry as his career develops, as well as in his tendency to return incessantly to the same

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avoids some of the needless romantic connotations of the former. The clearest political and ethical significance given by Shahid to the term can be seen in an anecdote Amitav Ghosh shares, where Shahid is asked by Barcelona airport security if he has anything dangerous on his person and he responds, "Only my heart" (64). I propose we take this more seriously than its joking tone might seem to invite. We might think also of Shahid's favorite form, the ghazal, which requires the poet to include his (pen-)name (*takhallus*) in the final couplet, which evince in Shahid's work an open interest poetic self-making, as seen in two of his most accomplished couplets: "And I, Shahid, only am escaped to tell thee— / God sobs in my arms. Call me Ishmael tonight" (375) and "They ask me to tell them what *Shahid* means: Listen, / It means 'The Belovéd' in Persian, 'witness' in Arabic" (373).

images, quotations, and even entire poems (as in his rewriting his ghazal on "Arabic"). Repetition has perhaps an inherently nostalgic tendency, and Shahid exploits that to great effect. But Shahid's repetitions do not mark the reinstatement of an identity. I have already stressed this in my reading of Shahid's translational ethics in the previous section, but now I can expand that account and give it a fuller meaning. When this poetry returns—whether through translation, refrain, or otherwise—it does so in the name of "fidelity," which is to say of a sincere affirmation of the nostalgic demand to return.

I spoke earlier of this affirmation as an "appropriation" and it may be helpful to clarify that term now. The term entered our conversation in noting that Shahid takes up Faiz's voice as his own by translating it and inserting it into his own poem sequence. It gained breadth as we observed that Shahid recontextualizes in more ways than one, always drawing words (of other people, poems, languages) into the greatest possible intimacy. Specifically, I contextualized this appropriation within a postcolonial moment within which Shahid felt the need to "translate" English into something more suitable for his needs. But there is a risk in such talk of unknowingly rehearsing the "bad" side of a familiar postcolonial critique. As Laetitia Zecchini says in the context of Indian modernism in general, "There is no such thing as a category that would correspond to 'our' [e.g., Indian] culture divorced from 'theirs,' a 'self' that could be entirely retrievable from the 'other'" (18). Good postcolonial poetry "challenges questions of ownership, propriety and property (in the sense of what is proper, what is mine, what language or tradition I am supposed to *own* or belong to)" (Zecchini 18). That is the sense of appropriation that rightly sent Derrida running (though wrongly, I suggest for Shahid, to talk of "depropriation"). But it is not so much a matter of being supposed to *own* or *belong* to something as it is of needing to *own up to* it. This sense of taking on responsibility, of appropriating not by

claiming an external thing as "mine" but of affirming and realizing a relationship that I already have, is often neglected in postcolonial discussions that focus on identity. One more word of caution, though, is necessary before letting the terminology rest. The sense I give to appropriation here must also not be taken to resonate with the corporate command that one "take ownership of" project. Such talk is predicated on an external authority that wants to disavow its own responsibility and keep the burden on those below. Rather appropriation, as I intend it here, suggests that what one owns up to is an *immanent* call.

For clues to Shahid's feeling such a call, we need look no further than his own extra-poetic remarks scattered in various interviews. Shahid appeals, for example, to the poetic commonplace that writing is less deliberate than responsive: "A phrase will occur somewhere, either spontaneously or someone will say something, a chance thing, and I'll say, ah, that can lead to a poem. Then I try to find some time when I can be alone and work on the poem" (Interview with Benvenuto 263). The basic metaphors are familiar: a muse-like inspiration and the need to "follow" where a poem leads. What they suggest, however, is made more explicit when repeated and given an ethical underlining. Later in the same interview, Shahid notes of his Holocaust poem, *Eurydice*, that it took him much longer to write than usual, an entire year in fact. Wanting to write a poem with a modern take on the familiar Greek myth, he remained disappointed by how "gimmicky" the conceits of his first experiments were (264). When finally a satisfying image arrived, it came in the form of a first line. For reference, the poem begins: "I am a woman / brought limping to Hell // under the Night / and Fog decree" (*Nostalgist's Map* 17). Of writing the poem, Shahid says, "It was willed willed and not quite willed because I couldn't take it anywhere until I got that opening sentence. Then I wrote it the way I would write any poem, which is, the opening phrase has demands and I take it where I can" (264). Note the

quasi-ethical tinge of "demands." Although the interview context allows a strictly aesthetic interpretation, I suggest that Shahid is blurring the lines quite intentionally here. The arrival of a poem overtly interested in the ethics of memory, itself a recurring theme for Shahid, is too great a coincidence to describe in terms of the merely aesthetic demand of the phrase.

As we have already seen, phrases provide the bedrock for Shahid's understanding of nostalgic inheritance, whether they are Ghalib's incomplete couplets or Emily Dickinson "[given]…line after line, complete from heart" (*Nostalgist's Map* 35). Any reader of Shahid's poetry, however, can attest to an experience that confirms the aptness of what may seem at first in the above-cited interview only to be a cliché about the poetic process. Even if Shahid were just speaking platitudes there, we would still be left with the fact that key phrases and images echo so clearly and profoundly across his oeuvre. His is a poetry driven and haunted by repetition. Compare these two fragments, the first from "I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight" and the second from "The Country Without a Post Office": "One must wear jeweled ice in dry plains / to will the distant mountains to glass" (178) and "so many fled, ran away, / and become refugees there, in the plains, / where they must now will a final dewfall / to turn the mountains to glass" (202). Both poems echo an earlier phrase from "I see Chile in the Rearview Mirror": "I see Argentina and Paraguay / under a curfew of glass" (161). "The Country Without a Post Office," moreover, also echoes clearly "A Dream of Glass Bangles" from a yet earlier collection, which came before the Kashmir crisis had even produced the need for "willing the mountains to glass." Such blatant repetition marks more than recurrent fascination (such as, for example, Heaney's for digging). It suggests the cultivation of a kind of mental habit or, as I am proposing here, aesthetic exercise, particularly in light of the broader formalism within which these repetitions gain a rhythmic force as well as an increasingly elaborate set of rules associated with

them. Before elaborating on this insight further, however, we must finish with the fourth of Foucault's four aspects of ethical practice.

I turn then, to the "*telos*" that Shahid's exercise seeks. That, I argue, shifts as his work goes on, and in particular, as he tries out different poetic forms. Primarily, we can distinguish between the ever greater intensity of feeling exhibited in "Country without a Post Office" and the maximally differentiated feeling of his late ghazals. Both, however, can be characterized as efforts to become affectively engaged with the world in a consistently "faithful" way, whatever that may mean in each context. The fact that Shahid is able to change between (at least) two teleological horizons in his poetry points to an aspect of his work that is not so satisfyingly captured by the Foucault-Hadot model of exercise (a fact foreshadowed by Trop's suggestion that aesthetic exercises are considerably less univocal and unidirectional than spiritual exercises). To understand that other aspect, I suggest a turn to Charles Altieri's Kantian model of affective-aesthetic exploration.

Altieri, in developing his expressivist account of "the affects," wants to avoid falling back on cognitivist and rationalist accounts of the emotions. This means that he must provide some source of impetus and order that is not strictly rational or "reasoned." To do this, he turns to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, which contains a distinction between "determinative" and "reflective" forms of judgment. The former "make decisions by bringing a particular under the rubric provided by some kind of generalization…Reflective judgments are quite different because they do not depend on generalizations. Rather, they operate by bringing unity to particular cases even when we cannot know the relevant principle" (Altieri 185). This distinction allows Kant to approach the work of the artist, which engages our capacity for reflective judgment, "as if it were producing laws for nature rather than imitating them or instantiating

them" (Altieri 185). What is important for Altieri here, is that this gives an account of how aesthetic agency can explore and evaluate possibilities without bringing them under the rubric of a pre-existing law. That is to say, Altieri believes his Kantian account of expression provides a way for us to think of a poem as proffering an immanent value, rather than appealing to a value we may already have had (at least articulately).

In Shahid's case, this allows us to understand his exercise not only as refinement of a particular affective tendency, but also as a series of experiments that can surprise even their creator with their satisfactions or dissatisfactions. Shahid thus might discover, more or less "by accident," that a particular poetic form (i.e., a particular kind of exercise) is ethically and aesthetically satisfying in a way that he did not consciously realize he was seeking. In my reading, for example, "Lennox Hill," marks the exhaustion of a particular mode of exercise, the point where Shahid realizes it has become an ethical and aesthetic dead-end.

In "Lennox Hill," Shahid confronts the death of his mother. It is the first poem he wrote after her death (Ghosh 74), and it marks both the end and the fulfillment of a poetic hiatus he took after her passing. "Lennox Hill" is obsessive. A canzone, it is more repetitive by design than any other poem he wrote, including even his two other canzones because of its greater rigor and tonal focus. A canzone contains 65 lines, each of which must end with one of only five words—in this case, *elephants*, *die*, *Kashmir*, *universe*, *mother*. One would think such a form would offer the fullest form of closure and stability, if any form could. And yet, Shahid can write in the middle of it that he is unable to write, and offer "*My mother / is my poem*" in response to the question, "*So how's the writing?*" That is, he can turn directly to the world *as poem*, and insist that care of the mother is care of the poem. The ethical claim is inescapable here, but more than that, we are reminded that form (and poetry more generally) is for Shahid not something to

visit, a structure to retreat to and then emerge from when it is time to act once again. Form is part of one's engagement with the world. That much accords with the discussion of exercises above. And yet if that were all there was to it, this poem would be more than a little anomalous, for it not only marks the beginning of a new period of productivity in Shahid's career, but it ends on a note of complete ethical exhaustion: "I enter this: *The Belovéd leaves one behind to die,* / For compared to my grief for you, what are those of Kashmir? / And what (I close the ledger) are the griefs of the universe / When I remember you—beyond all accounting—O my mother?" (249). Left behind simply to die, Shahid closes the book in which he writes, and finds himself unable even to countenance the injustices of the world in the face of the grief his poem has formed around him.[75] For a poet who thrives on the ethical call of nostalgia, the blotting out of both past and future can mark little more than the end of his poetic project so conceived. And yet it does not.

That it does not can be explained partly by appealing to the trivial observation that exercises are not achieved states, but processes. Hence, we have no reason to imagine Shahid's exhaustion in one poem would prove his exhaustion of the exercise more broadly. And, indeed, he continues to write poems in a similar vein, including another canzone, "The Veiled Suite" (with refrains *night, sense, eyes, see, veil*). But I believe that his concurrent experiments with ghazals mark an alternative exercise strategy that, whether consciously or not, answers to the concerns we see voiced in "Lennox Hill."

The ghazal, like the canzone, is characterized strongly by its use of refrain. Ghazals are poems written in self-contained, thematically distinct couplets that are united by a common

[75] I realize that this sentence risks seeming to trivialize his grief by implying that it is just a function of his poetry, and not "genuine," but I take his insistence that his poem "*is*" his mother as an invitation to see his life and poetry generally as thoroughly imbricated.

rhyme and refrain which closes each. Shahid became as his career progressed the foremost advocate for the form in the English language, editing an anthology of examples by American poets and writing his own collection, as well as delivering talks, translating examples, and generally selling the English-language poetry world on the virtues of this new form. I have already touched on one of those virtues (the renewal of clichéd rhymes) above. What interests me now is the particular spin Shahid puts on the thematics of the form and how it distinguishes him somewhat from other practitioners of the form who came before him in Urdu, Persian, and other traditions. For Shahid is enamored of the variability of the ghazal. Not only does he want each couplet to be self-contained, which is a standard feature of the form, but he becomes quite taken with the consequent idea that they should be as maximally so as possible. That is, as an affective exercise, one should exploit the ghazal's variable thematics and mood so as to find unity among the greatest possible affective (and thematic) multiplicity.

For the moment, I do not want to get caught up in the specifics of how Shahid deploys this principle. It is sufficient to note that it allows Shahid to escape the *weight* of nostalgic repetition without actually forgoing the repetition entirely. Whereas the canzone marked the culmination of a particular exercise of nostalgia, the ghazal marks a quite different one. In its case, Shahid can bring nostalgia to bear on a wide array of moods. As we shall see later in the chapter, this apparent contradiction is simply that: apparent. That does not mean that it is insignificant. In fact, it brings to light a distinctive trait of nostalgia that has so far gone untheorized among nostalgia critics. But what concerns me now is Altieri's expressivist model and how it can contribute to understanding Shahid's ethics.

The immanence of value that Altieri locates in aesthetic activity is crucial. Without it, we (along with Shahid) are left making only second-order judgments about the relative merit of one

practice over another. The problem with the latter position is that it shifts the domain of inquiry away from the literary. While that shift would perhaps be frustrating from a literary theorist's point of view, theory would survive. From a poetic perspective, however, the shift loses everything. And this loss is not merely the loss of value-production (which, after all, is not really what we are describing anyway). Consider it from the perspective of literary emotion again, Altieri's favorite whipping post. Altieri's work carefully skirts around (qualitative emotional) taxonomy, not because he believes it to be useless, but because he believes there is a danger that attends taxonomy in our culture. Namely, "there is a strong temptation once we have named an emotion to ignore the agents who manifest it. What we know about the motion suffices to tell us what the agent is probably experiencing. All that matters then about the agent is how his or her formative beliefs shaping the emotion are or are not adequate to the situation" (Altieri, *Particulars* 107). In losing the agent, we of course lose the poet. But more crucially, we lose what drives the poet. What drives Shahid is not his motivation, or even his emotion. His pursuit takes place in and through nostalgia, and to a certain extent it takes feeling nostalgic as its goal. But that goal is not set ahead of time, and that is where Altieri's crucial insight lies.

When Shahid tells his "phantom heart" to "feel it," *it* does not have a fixed referent. In that respect, it is like the undeveloped image of "Postcard from Kashmir" and "Evanescence" from "A Nostalgist's Map of America." What Shahid feels is a tendency or possibility in his feeling, the development of which is something he seeks to identify with. "Identification need not depend on classical forms of judgment," as Altieri argues:

> We can endorse a state and treat it as continuous with our self of self simply because of the satisfactions that emerge as we carry out the activity. Even when the endorsement becomes the taking of responsibility, we need not derive the

> responsibility from specific criteria. It is enough that we find ourselves wanting to be represented by our caring about a particular state and the social relations it entails. (*Particulars* 140)

Thus Shahid's nostalgic feeling can be pursued "in itself" even if it is clearly not *for* itself. But even referring to the feeling "itself" suggests too much, for as Altieri elsewhere insists, there is no definite concept unifying any given aesthetic creation, but rather "a series of felt rightnesses, without any need for an overall schema" (*Reckoning* 9). Shahid is "testing out what becomes valuable" as he engages a particular form of self (Altieri *Particulars* 140). What becomes valuable with the canzone and other "closed" forms that find in repetition and refrain an *insistence* is pure intensity. But intensity is burdensome. In the ghazal, by contrast, Shahid finds something more freeing, yet (perhaps) equally "faithful."

3.6 THE GIFT OF THE GHAZAL

When Shahid writes of his growing fussiness over Americans' use of the ghazal, he says that it was "[f]or a seemingly conservative, but to me increasingly radical reason—form for form's sake" (*Ravishing DisUnities* 1). In this section, I want to take up this claim as a guiding sentiment in looking at the form about which Shahid showed the greatest self-reflexivity, specific dedication, and of which he produced the most examples. My contention has been that Shahid in general evinces increasing devotion to "form for form's sake" across his career. I have so far developed this claim in primarily theoretical terms with a nod to sketching the interrelation between his various formal experiments and their place in a loosely progressive arc spanning his career. Now I turn to the ghazal to develop a rich case study of what it means for a particular form (rather than form in general) to become the site of committed aesthetic and moral experimentation. This will entail looking at least as closely at Shahid's theoretical discussion of

the form as at his examples themselves, since the former will help clarify the latter.

First we need some general background. The ghazal form is a striking choice for Shahid, the self-proclaimed nostalgist, not only because his relationship to it is nostalgic (both in the personal sense that he attests to feeling nostalgia for and through it and in the discursive sense that he claims to want for Americans to return to the form's origins). The ghazal form is also itself contiguous with realms inhabited by nostalgia. I mentioned earlier in the chapter that Urdu ghazal poets such as Mir and Ghalib are part of a long tradition that performatively mourns the fall of Delhi's court life with its poetic vibrancy, but the ghazal genre more broadly, as practiced in Shahid's beloved Urdu, is itself a genre of longing. Frances Pritchett describes some of the thematic fundamentals of the form:

> At the most basic thematic level, the ghazal is the first-person voice of a passionate male lover who laments his lack of access to his beloved [of ambiguous reference, including male, female, abstract, and divine levels of resonance]…The lover knows from the beginning that he is doomed. This genre thus has at its heart a mood of desperate, mystical, romantic love-as-death, pain-as-pleasure. The beloved is irresistibly beautiful and always somehow unavailable. The lover's passion is always transgressive, unstoppable, doomed. (Introduction11-12)

We see then where the appeal might lie for someone interested in nostalgia. From the perspective of someone invested in the thematics of the ghazal universe, the past may become just another species of inaccessible beloved. Moreover, by adding in a few formal features of the genre, we can see its resonance with nostalgia even more clearly. The ghazal, as Shahid describes it, is a poetic form,

> composed of autonomous or semi-autonomous couplets that are united by a strict scheme of rhyme, refrain, and line length. The opening couplet sets up the scheme by having it in both lines, and then the scheme occurs only in the second line of every succeeding couplet— i.e., the first line (same length) of every succeeding couplet sets up a suspense, and the second line (same length but with the rhyme and refrain— the rhyme immediately preceding the refrain) delivers on that suspense by amplifying, dramatizing, imploding, exploding. (*Call Me* 18)

There is much to unpack here, and it will help to look at some examples.

Consider the opening poem in the posthumous volume that gathers together Shahid's original ghazals, *Call Me Ishmael Tonight* (2003). "Ghazals traditionally do not have titles," the volume notes, but for "convenience," Shahid refers to each by its refrain (13). The poem before us, is therefore called "I have loved":

> I must go back briefly to a place I have loved
> to tell you those you will efface I have loved. (23)

Minor in both length and stature, it has not, to my knowledge, received much critical attention. As an inaugural work, however, it bears some scrutiny. Specifically, I find it hard to escape the sense that Shahid is announcing his ambitions for the collection, that the ghazals to follow bear this message that he needs to share, and that in each one he will be speaking from the place he has loved. "Giving" the ghazal, particularly to America, is a task I hold to be at the heart of Shahid's poetic enterprise—and in a more profound sense than popularizing the genre—so I want to spend some time exploring the implications of the above lines.

For readers familiar with Shahid's work, the "place I have loved" is apt to sound like a name for Kashmir. Ravaged by war since the early 90s and hardly a symbol of peace before that,

Kashmir is one of the most enduring and potent figures across Shahid's career. As Aamir Mufti has recently shown in a *tour-de-force* reading of Shahid's oeuvre, Shahid's Kashmir represents his (and our) desperate need to imagine a space outside the the logic of the modern nation-state (180-202). Given that interpretive horizon, the "you" who "will efface" Shahid's loved ones resonates on a number of levels: not only does it invoke the Indian nation and its army effacing the people of Kashmir, but also anyone observing the on-going strife, even sympathetically to Kashmiris, from what Mufti would call an Orientalist perspective, i.e., one that tries to make sense of the peoples involved in terms of indigeneity, identity, and their respective claims to nationhood.

Our Kashmir-centric reading need not end there; "I have loved" affords elaboration at some length on that front. There is, for example, a subtle pun in the speaker's saying that he must go back "briefly,"—which is not just for a short while, but also by brief, i.e., by post, to the very place that an earlier book of Shahid's called "The Country Without a Post Office." Then, keeping in that vein, we could note that just as the letter cannot arrive, the poem cannot really end. The ghazal goes unfinished, stopping well before the requisite five couplets.

However suggestive the above line of interpretation may prove, it keeps us on familiar terrain. Home is a place thematized as nostalgic site of return. If we add the metapoetic framing mentioned earlier into the mix, a layer of abstraction complicates the seeming obviousness of what nostalgia means here. Opening a collection of ghazals, "I have loved" points not only outward to the world but forward to the book that follows. Taking that book as Shahid's "go[ing] back briefly to a place [he has] loved," we find the ghazal form itself a site of return, love, and hence nostalgia. Still, what it means to go back to the ghazal is not necessarily cut and dry. Does it entail returning to where the ghazal "came from," its "home"? If so, it is not clear whether that

would be a geographical site, a cultural milieu, or something else entirely. What is more, there is always the possibility that Shahid considers the ghazal itself—i.e., the form of the ghazal—to offer a kind of home to which to return. He was, notably, quite fond of the etymological trivia that locates our English "stanza" in an Italian "room," or the even earlier "standing, stopping place."[76]

We need not choose among these options. The ghazal form, as Shahid offers it to us, is made to hold such echoing ambiguity, as I hope to show. From poetic-existential to the culturalist-nativist, to the anti-Orientalist, each resonance has its own claim to our attention. Each also has its own noteworthy impact on the word "must" in the first line: "I must go back…to tell you." In less formally focused interpretations, it sounds rather contingent. I must go back to Kashmir, say, because you will listen only to someone of my international stature, not to the ones you would efface. Alternatively, I must go back to the home of the ghazal in order to claim the authority of native informant, without which you will ignore me and go on writing your ghazals wrongly. For both these readings, we might say that in a better world I would not have to go back, but the "must" runs deeper if we take Shahid to refer to the ghazal *qua* ghazal. Then it means something like: I must show you the form, telling you would never be sufficient. Why? Because I have loved it. Which is to say that form in this case is not simply a matter of rules, but of nostalgic affect. You will, by writing new ones, efface the ghazals *as I have loved them.* At least, though, you will do so knowing the love that enables the effacement in the first place.

To give some contextual weight to the above reading, it is worth noting that by the time this poem was published, Shahid had been for many years a zealous advocate of the ghazal in English. Four years earlier, he had edited and published an anthology of poets, mostly American,

[76] See, for example, his poem, "Rooms are Never Finished," discussed below.

writing what its subtitle promised were "real ghazals in English." It began with an introduction, explaining why the ghazal would be such a great thing for American poetry. That introduction began curiously enough with a refusal of the ghazal to America, Shahid noting that some years prior he had felt compelled to "take back the gift outright." It is an odd opening, and the language of cultural exchange is familiar enough that we are apt to misinterpret it. The problem for Shahid is not that Americans have appropriated a form that does not belong to them; it is that they never got hold of the thing in the first place *to* appropriate it.[77] When we realize this, our realization also stands as a rebuke to a possible misunderstanding of the book's subtitle: "real ghazals in English." Here again we court confusion if we fall back on a familiar discourse of authenticity, imagining that "real" contrasts with "fake" or "inauthentic" ghazals. Shahid speaks with too much of a wink in his eye for us to pin him down that easily.

To determine what he does mean, we must observe that Shahid's "taking back" the gift coincides exactly with his giving it again. It is an action done entirely in mime. I imagine something like a man faking at fetch to get his dog to look where he throws. Only in our case, the poets had long been playing with an invisible ball; Shahid wanted them finally to see the "real thing." He flaunts the artifice of the gesture. A few paragraphs into his introduction, he notes the pleasure of play-acting that came with his project, saying that he had "found it tantalizing to strike a playful pose of Third-World arrogance, laced with a Muslim snobbery." And, lest we mistake that "playful" role for its somber cousin, he stresses immediately that he is not "playing

[77] I take this sentiment to be hinted at in Shahid's claim that at least free verse sonnets "have departed from somewhere," while the free verse forms parading as ghazals come from, it would seem, nowhere. Although Shahid repeats the idea of "departures from a definite place" (Introduction to *Ravishing* 2), he never explicitly says the faux-ghazal comes from nowhere, so it might be more appropriate to say that the American faux-ghazals come from the same old place as any American poem, which with respect to the ghazal, might as well be nowhere.

some kind of wise sage from the East" (2).

By focusing on these theatrics, we see something important. Although he speaks in familiar imperative and indicative forms, Shahid is neither asserting his authority, nor making propositional claims. He is offering a gift, albeit one that—as it turns out—had already been given.[78] This is the kind of gesture I suggest is fruitful for understanding the home Shahid that sees in the ghazal. It is, first of all, something that can be shared. And it is shared not simply by listing rules or describing, but by miming the giving and the withholding of it, by showing it (and insisting it must be shown) in the "I have loved" couplet. The nostalgic refuge Shahid holds out, then, is a kind of know-how quite different from the forms of "knowing that" that underly thematic takes on nostalgia, where the nostalgic either knows or does not know that she cannot really return home.

Let us return to the metaphorics of Shahid's introduction. The ghazal is, as we have seen, a "gift," one to be taken back, given, and—crucially—accepted: "Perhaps one way to welcome the shackles of the form and be in emotional tune with them is to remember one definition of the word *ghazal*: It is the cry of the gazelle when it is cornered in the hunt and knows it will die" (Introduction 3). What are we to make of a gift whose giving and receiving remain so uncertain, in need of instruction? Note that he does not give the gift, at least initially. It was already given, surely not by anyone in particular. Cultures are already standing in a posture of generosity towards each other, on this view, but it always remains in question whether or not something has been actually received or merely claimed. After all, America had already been producing many "ghazals." That was what spurred Shahid to write edit his anthology and to introduce it so

[78] Here it may be instructive to consider a parallel metaphor he uses elsewhere, finding that each of his "two [cultural] loyalties, on loan to each other, are now so one that the loan has been forgiven. No, forgotten" (Introduction to *Rebel's* xxv). It is a metaphor that invites the question of agency: who has the authority to give and forgive such loans?

provocatively; he had been reading "so many monthlies and quarterlies," out of which came "floating" disappointment—ghazals in nothing but name, written predominately by Americans with no substantial education in the tradition. Still, Shahid confesses to liking many of them (11), so we might wonder why he nonetheless felt irked. He alludes to both politics and aesthetics by way of answer.

In a mood of sly grandiosity, he climactically closes his introduction with the claim, "If one writes in free verse—and one should—to subvert Western civilization, surely one should write in forms to save oneself *from* Western civilization" (13). And yet, he stresses, he is no "rheumatic formalist…certainly not the kind who wishes to save Western civilization—with meters and rhymes!" What is more, there is "no such thing" as the West, or for that matter the East (12). Still, the claim stands. Saving oneself from Western civilization is, according to Shahid, a non-trivial possibility, perhaps only by allowing one to step outside the fiction. The question then is how the ghazal form opens up any such space. Let us consider the pedagogical techniques Shahid uses to get us to see it: where he offers incentive, where he discourages, why he chooses this mistake to correct and not that, etc.

One thing Shahid names as a boon of our taking up the ghazal is its ability to disrupt the "thirst for unity that haunts the 'Westerner,' even in these fussingly nonlinear days" (5). In saying so, he both invokes a fact about the ghazal—in comparison to European poetic forms, it has no thematic unity, in fact no permanent unity of any kind as it can always be added to or excerpted from—and betrays his own curious exaggeration of the form's potentials. Shahid does not simply write thematically unlinked couplets, he positively revels in the difference between them, at times even seeming to maximize it. Thus Shahid can open a ghazal with desolation and hopelessness—"The pure pain with which he recognizes angels / has left him without cures

among the dreamless angels"—and close that same ghazal with the winking braggadocio of "You play innocence so will, with such precision, Shahid: / You could seduce god himself and fuck the sexless angels" (341, 342). The liberating autonomy of couplets is his greatest insistence. "[T]he issue here is that by following the form of the ghazal, the writer could find herself tantalizingly liberated, surprising herself with unusual discoveries by being stringent with herself as she goes from one theme to another in couplet after couplet" (12). The notion of surprise is crucial, and it reinforces the notion of form as exercise and, more fundamentally, as habituation and self-formation, for to cultivate the ability to be surprised is to practice specific techniques that foster not only the capacity to be surprised, but also re-orient the self so that it can produce its own surprises.[79] A poet can thus embrace the fact that she does *not* know herself or her world and yet she does possess the means for exploring what she does not know, for keeping that non-knowing open as a space for action rather than passivity.

For Shahid, our acceptance of the form's "ravishing disunity," as his anthology title calls it, does not mean that we completely *lose* the thirst for unity, only that we reorient ourselves with respect to it. Now the expectation is that we will not find it, but will instead search for and feel its absence, albeit in new ways. Tellingly, Shahid's vision of the "cultural unity" of the ghazal plays on the thematic disunity of form. The cultural unity lies in our being "in emotional tune" with the form's rigors, as we saw earlier. Being so means, among other things, feeling the "desperation" of the form, which is Shahid's second big selling point of the ghazal: "the ghazal offers English a chance to find a formal way, a 'legal' way out, to cultivate a profound respect

[79] Shahid notes that a new ghazal writer may "find herself tantalizingly liberated, surprising herself with unusual discoveries by being stringent with herself as she goes from one theme to another in couplet after couplet" (12). He then goes on to stress that the discoveries can be political, even revolutionary.

for desperation—something that American poetry has not altogether lost. As for the English? Let me leave it there" (11). That tongue-in-cheek comment reminds us of Shahid's enduringly fascinated and fascinating relationship to the concept of America—a topic for another essay. But what should interest us now is how Shahid tries to get us to see and feel the desperation in the form.

To do that, Shahid appeals strategically to nostalgia (or exoticism, which often cannot be distinguished from a kind of nostalgia anyway), somewhat to his own, but more relevantly to what he hopes ours will be. He refers to the "breathless excitement" the form generates in context, and the context is not insignificantly social: the *mushaira,* i.e.,

> the traditional poetry gathering to which sometimes thousands of people come to hear the most cherished poets of the country—when the poet recites the first line of a couplet, the audience recites it back to him, and then the poet repeats it, and the audience again follows suit. This back and forth creates an immensely seductive tension because everyone is waiting to see how the suspense will be resolved in terms of the scheme established in the opening couplet; that is, the first line of every succeeding couplet sets the reader (or the listener) up so that the second line amplifies, surprises, explodes. (8)

The passage is, appropriately enough, in the present tense. Mushairas are still held, albeit less often (and less prestigiously) than in the past. Nonetheless, the loving description could easily be confused for a nostalgic vignette, and for a contemporary American poet to hear of "thousands" attending a reading, actively responding after listening with bated breath, is certainly to hear something like a nostalgic dream of what poetry was or at least should have been. The nostalgia is not, however, empty of suggestions for how to achieve it, and Shahid's description of the

scene goes on at some length even after the above quotation ends in an attempt to get everyone to see how it is done.

The ultimate nostalgic technique Shahid uses to share the form, though, is his own writing of ghazals. His work exemplifies various features of the Urdu ghazal that mark it as other than the ordinary American poem. He "urduize[s]" his language, as Jahan Ramazani observes (*Hybrid* 38). While that is obvious enough, and not a little deceptive, on the level of syntax and even vocabulary, where his real urduizing lies is in his marked preference for what ghazal critics call *insha'iya* over *khabariyya* utterances. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi glosses these terms as "non-falsifiable" and "falsifiable" respectively: "Interrogative, subjunctive, vocative, imperative utterances are *insha'iya;* no determination can be made about their being true or false" ("On Reading Ghalib"). In Urdu, the word *kyā* helps encourage the explosion of meaning behind such statements. As Frances Pritchett observes,

> This versatile interrogative can be used to signal a positive exclamation ('What a wonderful thing!'), or a negative one ("What—as if it's a wonderful thing!'); or else it can introduce a yes-or-no question ("Is it a wonderful thing?"). Since classical ghazals were never punctuated, in many verses all three possibilities are available, and none can be ruled out. (123)

While the same is less true of punctuated English, Shahid does a formidable job with multivalency, as I tried to show earlier in my reading of the relatively simple "I have loved." To more specifically illustrate the principle here, however, we can consider the second line of the following couplet: "Ancestors, you've left me a plot in the family graveyard — / Why must I look, in your eyes, for prayers in Arabic?" The mood and tone of the line are quite variable. The somewhat strained syntax and overdetermined punctuation leaves "in your eyes" as variously the

site for searching (I must look in your eyes), the origin of the demand (in your eyes, I must do this), and the place where the demand is interpreted (in your eyes, I must do it this way, i.e., in Arabic). Is the speaker mourning the loss of his ancestral language or outraged that his ancestors still make claims on him? The couplet will not decide for us, and, Shahid suggests, the couplet prompts us to keep on proliferating meanings.

One of the central insights to be gleaned from a reading of Shahid's ghazals as an exercise is nostalgia is thus how open nostalgia is to other affective (as well as interpretive) possibilities. This point raises an important implication about nostalgia more broadly that has so far escaped much theoretical attention. There is a crucial set of differences among, for example, nostalgia as what Shahid calls a "formal feeling" (i.e., an exercise); what we ordinarily think of as a nostalgic mood; and the tone or affective quality of an artistic work itself. These differences may be clarified somewhat by considering a quite distinct case. In a recent article in *Critical Inquiry*, Paul Allen Anderson takes up the question of "mood" music such as neo-Muzak and other forms of "affective self-management" (824), which are achieved via a kind of "sonic air conditioning" (816). Intriguingly, Anderson argues that nostalgia is key to understanding this phenomenon, because of its reliance on the music's being *familiar*. "Such music is likely to temporarily induce pleasant psychic involution through nostalgia and thus reduce negative forms of anxiety-inducing stimulation keyed to the present or risk-assessment about the future," he claims (834). Finding fault with the tendency of cultural critics to reduce nostalgia to "pastoral and reactionary images" (which I might prefer to call a set of nostalgia genres with recognizable tropic patterning), Anderson persuasively extends nostalgic paradigms to include "retrospection…focus[ed] on exciting and energizing non-pastoral images from music-critical periods in a listener's youth" (835). Anderson's point is powerful, but risks going too far if we

assume nostalgia simply empties the music of whatever conceptual and emotional content it might be said to have "on its own." There is a crucial difference between a 35-year-old woman listening nostalgically to riot grrrl bands, recalling a feeling of revolutionary feminist potential, and a 70-year-old man wistfully listening to Christmas music from his childhood. There is, in fact, a difference between any number of nostalgic repetitions one could engage in (forms of nostalgic exercise), so we must not reduce them to the fact of their musical repetition alone (a category or mode of nostalgic exercise), let alone subsume them within an overarching framework that would include all modes of nostalgic recall.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has tracked Shahid's investments in nostalgia from an early thematic interest that already disrupts conventional, cognitive accounts to a later, more free-floating set of exercises meant to rehearse and build off of nostalgic sentiment. It has thus provided a much-needed deepening of a frequent observation about Shahid's poetic career, namely what Kazim Ali has characterized as a "trajectory" that Shahid's poetry "traveled…from sense to sound" (1). Bruce King independently arrives at the same conclusion, albeit in consternation. The intuition, though, as we now see, is well-founded, even as it remains vague and a bit misleading. After all, it is not as though Shahid's early poems were unmusical. Now we can see that, in terms of nostalgia, the trajectory can be followed with a bit more precision: from a more object-oriented nostalgia to a more exercise-oriented one. The path is not perfectly linear, of course. Shahid's early poetry already evinces many of the later investments, and vice versa. However, by attending to it, we can see the phenomenological and affective contours of Shahid's nostalgia and thereby shift our attention away from routes of nostalgia criticism that have become relative dead-ends.

CHAPTER 4: NOSTALGIC INNOVATION

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter was able to make its case for nostalgia as an aesthetic exercise largely by appealing to the convenient fact that Agha Shahid Ali's nostalgia could be accounted for in largely non-referential terms, terms that avoided talking about his beliefs about the past or even about states of affairs in the world. Reference came in only as a fore- and after-thought—something that gave rise to conditions suitable for his particular nostalgic exercise, and which in turn allowed him to affirm the exercise after the fact, but that did not primarily shape the exercise itself. In the case of Modern Sanskrit, however, reference presents itself as a problem almost immediately, particularly since postcolonial critics have often drawn attention to the claims to (and about) the past made by certain aggressive forms of nationalism.

Shahid could pursue any of the various strands of aesthetic practice available to him by participating in well-established traditions of nostalgia poetry in English and co-articulating them with what he took to be parallel traditions in Urdu. No such luck presents the Modern Sanskrit nostalgist. There is no established tradition of nostalgia in Sanskrit—indeed, no word for precisely that phenomenon. A consequence of this is that the nostalgic practices of Modern Sanskrit writers necessarily take up the question of nostalgia at a more basic level. Whereas Shahid could see it simply as a poetic-linguistic practice that simply brought various facets of the world to attention, a Modern Sanskrit poet such as Radhavallabh Tripathi has to decide whether and how language (the object and lens of his nostalgia) can even be brought into contact with the world in the first place. In other words, Tripathi's poetry raises the problem of nostalgic reference anew.

This chapter argues that the "solution" that Tripathi offers is that, rather than

presupposing some relationship between then and now as most theorists have suggested, nostalgia can simply be the process whereby what counts as "now" comes into question. In other words, while love and desire for the past *may* result in a violent negation of the present, they may equally be a way of constructing a present that seems to offer some critical way forward into the future. In Tripathi's case, as I will show, the word "critical" is particularly apt, since he takes up a stance of political and environmental critique at various points in his poetry. In the process of exploring this, we shall also see how nostalgia can own up to the newness it itself is in the world and thereby become a vehicle for innovation, rather than rote repetition. "Rote repetition," after all, is precisely the charge Modern Sanskrit anxiously awaits, since its liveliness depends on its ability to claim something more than that.

I begin this chapter, therefore, by sketching a brief history of Sanskrit as it comes to be modern, stressing in particular the way in which the language comes to stand as a symbol for nationalist memory even as its use as such presupposes its discursive death. With that historical framework in mind, I turn to my case study: Radhavallabh Tripathi's *Laharīdaśakam* (*Ten Waves)*. I suggest that this work, particularly its first poem—a nostalgic search for the "spring" of classical yore—is an extended way of asking what it means for tradition to be "alive" in the present (or for that matter, dead). I propose that one of the crucial insights arrived at in the poem is that the past, while unavailable for direct retrieval, *is* available for (re)describing the present in ways that are distinct from languages "of" the present. That process itself inevitably re-describes (and remediates) the images of the past it has taken up for its work.

However, such use of "present" and "past" to describe these two sites comes under scrutiny as the poem and my analysis continue. As the poem proceeds, it ambiguates productively between temporal and spatial-conceptual interpretive frameworks in the service of

ultimately proposing a model of poetry that relies less on representation of the world than on its construction (Tripathi calls what he does "realizing"). There are many implications of this shift, which I suggest challenges, among other things, the influential distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia proposed by Svetlana Boym.

The new problematic signaled by the turn to political and ethical criticisms of nostalgia prompts me later in the chapter to examine key concepts such as "continuity" and "fidelity to origins" that have played a large role in postcolonial criticism as signs of danger or mistake in the process of coming to terms with colonialism. My reading of Tripathi's poem suggests that these terms still require clarification and complication, despite (or perhaps because of) longstanding use as a kind of critical shorthand in postcolonial theory.

In Tripathi's case, I put forth a two-fold claim: firstly, that Tripathi is not interested in denying or suppressing socio-cultural discontinuity in the name of a "pure" and proud nation (i.e., the poem's nostalgia is not fundamentalist); and secondly, that nostalgia's critique of the present does not rely on a prejudgment of what the present is. Nostalgia can simply *be* the process of bringing the present into question, rather than an emotional after-shock of presupposing some particular, well-defined relationship between past and present.

The final sections of the chapter concern the domains of poetics (what primarily seems to concern Tripathi) and politics (what follows from that concern for both Tripathi and his potential readers). Poetics allows me to reconsider the practical question of what fidelity to the past might mean in the case of this poem, assuming not simply that it tries to achieve it but that in some meaningful sense that it does (as the "realization" of spring suggests). It also allows me to specify some of what I take to be new and noteworthy about Tripathi's case within the context of scholarship on postcolonial poetry. The question of politics is not, for this chapter at least, a

matter of advocated policy, nor of successful intervention in nationalist memory culture. The question is rather of the relationship between politics and the nostalgia at play in the poem. I argue in closing that while there are grounds for political concern or critique in the poem, they are ill-captured by the nostalgia paradigm; and conversely, the nostalgia paradigm can allow us to see the emergence of new, constructive ways of approaching political life in India.

4.1 SANSKRIT'S ARRIVAL AS A MEMORY SITE: A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH

Modern Sanskrit literature cannot easily escape its status as an apparent oxymoron. Sheldon Pollock (2001) famously declared the "death of Sanskrit," and regardless of the stance one takes in the debate that has followed Pollock's article, thinking "Sanskrit" without raising the question of death has become nearly impossible. "Death" is in the air, and much of the best modern Sanskrit literature is inflected with the tension and uncertainty that come from seeking life in a "dead" language. In what follows, I chart one poet's engagement with Sanskrit as a language of the past. By mining the memorial past encoded in Sanskrit's literary and linguistic heritage, Radhavallabh Tripathi accomplishes a kind of nostalgic innovation that opens up unique—albeit rather tame—forms of contemporary social, political, and ecological critique. It is not Tripathi's (lack of) radicalness that is the subject of this chapter, however, but rather the distinctive structure of his critique and the possibilities it affords, both aesthetically and politically. My contention is that Modern Sanskrit foregrounds a new problematic for theorizing postcolonial nostalgia that allows us to approach contemporary critical conversations about untranslatability, multilingualism, and cultural identity in new and invigorating ways.

Sanskrit, with its several-millennia-long history, occupies an especially resonant place in the cultural imagination of contemporary India. As the language of the ancient Veda and other canonical religious texts, Sanskrit is often made to stand as the symbol *par excellence* of Indian

tradition, particularly in its specifically Hindu dimension.[80] In so doing, conservative ideologues seek to harness the language and its attendant memorial images to "stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, [and] to immortalize death" (Nora "Between" 19). It thus functions as what Pierre Nora calls a *lieu de mémoire,* or site of memory. For Nora, a *lieu de mémoire* can be "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" ("From *Lieux*" xvii). Although he initially intended them to be uniquely French, later scholars have found the concept useful in other contexts as well, particularly with reference to modern nation-state formation.[81]

As with Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, the dominant understanding of Sanskrit is premised on rupture and discontinuity, recalling for many a pre-colonial golden age before the Indian subcontinent was "violated" by the intrusion of outside forces (whether Islamic or Western). But whereas Nora takes the notion of rupture seriously—"Given to us as radically other, the past has become a world apart" (17)—we should understand the contemporary mobilization of Sanskrit qua memory-site as a *performance* of rupture. It is not that "an immense and intimate fund of memory [has] disappear[ed]" (Nora "Between" 12), causing it to be reconstituted as a *lieu de mémoire*. Rather, Sanskrit's use as a *lieu* presupposes and surreptitiously produces the gulf between past and present that conservative politicians then claim to be able to bridge. Therefore my reading of Sanskrit is not another rehearsal of Nora's methodology in the Indian context

[80] Contemporary memory of Sanskrit as being especially Hindu is of course deeply problematic. Sanskrit has been used by diverse heterodox religions such as Buddhism, as well as for a wide variety of secular uses. For a historical overview of the functions of Sanskrit, see Pollock's (2006) magisterial account of what he calls the "Sanskrit Cosmopolis."
[81] For examples in the Indian context, see Erll (2009) on the 'Mutiny' of 1857 and Talbot (2016) on Prithviraj.

(though a sustained look at Sanskrit from that perspective would be helpful to scholarship). Instead, I am looking to a particular corpus for its subversions of the logic of such *lieux*.

But before I turn to that corpus, it is necessary to understand a bit more concretely what that logic is. It is, first of all, a product of colonialism. To see how, we must briefly rehearse the story of Sanskrit's use in the modern period. As noted in the Introduction, what I am calling "Modern Sanskrit" began in earnest somewhere in the late 18th or early 19th century. Anglo-American scholars note it negatively when they claim that the object of their study—i.e., 'authentic' Sanskrit—continues "well into the nineteenth century" (Peterson 1). Indian scholars, on the other hand, locate its inception a bit more positively when they compose compendious lists debunking the supposed "death" of their language. Both sides—to the extent that they care to talk about it—could probably agree with the late Sanskritist, V. Raghavan, that it began with a bifurcation. Some pandits continued along the traditional path, while others interacted more interestedly with the colonial government and its new institutions. They (the latter collaborators) gave birth to a complex series of renegotiations, borrowings, and innovations that can only be accounted for under a new historical heading: let's call it "modern."[82]

They, however, did not yet recognize the trait that would become the defining feature of their language's modernity, namely, its death. More precisely, they had not yet come to see the liveliness of their own language use as up for question.[83] They may have sensed that their

[82] See the next section below for a discussion of what kind of "modernity" is at issue in Modern Sanskrit. My use of the term is largely heuristic, however. I am not making any strong claims about the status of "the modern" in colonial or postcolonial India. Much fine theoretical work has been done elsewhere on questions related to that.

[83] As noted in the introduction, language "death" is a multivocal term that can refer to a variety of phenomenon. In the case of Sanskrit, the three most common senses of "life" from which "death" follows are:

cultural capital was dwindling, but they still felt confident enough in the language to use it for political leverage, writing odes to colonial figures, for example. Warren Hastings, an early administrator in Bengal, attested to the vitality of the language (and this gesture) by collecting Sanskrit panegyrics "to be filed against his impeachment" (Raghavan 3). Sanskrit writers were, however, soon to find the world less receptive to their continued activity. By the time India achieved independence, no writer in Sanskrit (excluding perhaps—and to a very limited extent—those pockets of traditional pundits mentioned earlier) could take for granted the liveliness of their language. They didn't agree that it was dead, but they knew that what they were doing was disagreeing.

An important implication of the story I have just sketched is that Sanskrit's death is a specifically retrospective observation, made possible (or rather inevitable) by the frames of colonial and later post-colonial historiography. This fact entailed the collapse of a distinction between local practice and orientalist knowledge. Specifically, Sanskrit—insofar as it "dies"—becomes identical with the object of the colonial Indologist's study. The historical mechanics of this collapse are beyond the scope of this chapter, but we can note several snapshots of this history in order to get an impression of its import.

To begin, Sanskrit encounters the colonial education system. The early nineteenth

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(1) openness to grammatical evolution in response to conditions of everyday speech (in which case Sanskrit died when it was fixed by the grammarian Panini in the 4th century BCE)

(2) currency as the primary vehicle for large-scale literary production and circulation (the condition which Pollock's "The Death of Sanskrit" suggests ceased to obtain somewhere around the 11th century)

(3) relevant and available for meaningfully productive use.

It is the last sense that will hold the attention of the rest of this chapter, for it is the anxiety or possibility of obsolescence that names the context in which nostalgia can stake its claims to the contrary.

century saw heated debates between so-called "Orientalists" and "Anglicists," camps which advocated the education of colonial subjects in indigenous classical languages and English, respectively.[84] Macaulay's infamous 1835 "Minute on Education" marks the eventual triumph of the latter, but prior to their defeat, the Orientalists managed to gain enough traction that some Sanskrit schools were established. The founding of one such institution, the Sanskrit College in Calcutta, provoked a letter in 1823 from one of the canonical "makers of modern India," Rammohan Roy.[85] This letter gives us our first snapshot of Sanskrit's Indologization, for Roy needs to appeal to the colonial government and what better way to do that than to use their own discourse? Roy is himself a bit of an Anglicist as far as education is concerned, as he believes that Sanskrit schools will prevent Indians from gaining currency in the types of knowledge that yield power and viability in the new colonial order. He makes his point scathingly:

> This seminary…can only be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practicable use to the possessors or to society. The pupils will there acquire *what was known two thousand years ago, with the addition of vain and empty subtleties since produced by speculative men*, such as is already commonly taught in all India. (111, emphasis added)

The sentiment could as well have been expressed by a colonial figure: Sanskrit's sole offerings lie in ancient history, and at best the intervening years have decadently finessed and multiplied

[84] For an analysis of this controversy that illuminates some of the following discussion by highlighting the shared assumptions on both sides that Christianize religious discourse in India, see Raf Gelders and Willem Derde's "Mantras of Anti-Brahmanism." I do not subscribe to all that they argue, but find their highlighting of those shared assumptions clarifying.
[85] I allude to Ramachandra Gupta's anthology of major voices in the political-intellectual terrain of modern India, The *Makers of Modern India.*

its outmodedness. Certainly progress has not been made. That is why the colonial education project is necessary in the first place.

And yet, as Bruce Carlisle Robertson points out, in 1826, just three years after making the above remarks, Roy "founded his own Vedanta College to train his growing band of followers…to read and teach Vedanta in Sanskrit" (35). Moreover, the original letter goes on to point out that it is not the promotion of Sanskrit that he objects to, but rather the non-teaching of English and its associated arts and sciences, "for there have been always and are now numerous professors of Sangscrit [sic] in the different parts of the country, engaged in teaching this language as well as the other branches of literature which are to be the object of the new seminary" (43). This is a quite different argument. Sanskrit, although antiquated, is not dead. In fact, its life is so well attested that teaching more of it is redundant.[86] This second line of argument, however, recedes into the background as colonial history progresses and the Anglicists win out. What is remembered and remediated in future discussions of Sanskrit is the first line: Sanskrit's antiquatedness and its latter-day decadence. As Christophe Jaffrelot has noted, it was during the period in which Roy's reformism flourished that the concept of a "Vedic 'golden age' when Hinduism was superior to Christianity can be seen to crystallize" (*Reader* 8).

Where Roy had diminished the scope of Sanskrit's claim to greatness even in its 'golden age' to "grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions," later figures such as Dayananda Saraswati would expand the claims to an exhaustive scope:

> While the Brahmo Samajis [members of a reformist society established by Roy]

[86] I realize that there is some slippage here in referring to the language as "living" or not as a medium of education on the one hand and as a medium of production on the other. That distinction, though, is not especially pertinent in light of the manifest continuation of literary production in Sanskrit that provides the object of my study. The various works on Modern Sanskrit by Raghavan provide an overview of material produced during this period.

> focused on the religious dimension of the Vedic 'golden age,' Dayananda argued that, in addition to its spiritual glory, Indian antiquity was imbued with cultural and social greatness. The Vedic epoch was in his construction no longer embodied only in spirituality but also in a people—in its culture and its land. (Jaffrelot *Reader* 9)

That is by the 1870's, and it marks the beginnings of Hindu Nationalism as we know it today. Figures who take up this line of thought no longer accept Roy's welcoming of English knowledge. Sanskrit now becomes an unequivocal ideal, vying in direct opposition to colonial intrusion, conceived both in terms of British and Islamic invasion. Specifically, Sanskrit becomes the site for defending such colonially disapproved practices as caste. The association of Sanskrit with these defenses becomes so great that by the turn of the twentieth century, Har Bilas Sarda, writing a book called *Hindu Superiority* (1906) could refer in defense of his position to a paper delivered by a Hindu to the International Congress of Orientalists in Berlin in 1881. That the paper was delivered in such a context is telling enough, but what is most interesting is its title: "Sanskrit as a Living Language in India." Sarda quotes a paragraph of the essay, which it turns out is neither about Sanskrit literary production nor its use as a spoken medium of instruction, but about the glories of the caste system in Vedic times, before it was corrupted in later practice (Jaffrelot *Reader* 53).

By the twentieth century, then, the "life" of Sanskrit is debated in terms (and venues) entirely consonant with Indological discourse, namely in ways that unify Sanskrit as "a" culture, glorify its past, and find it decadent in intervening years (to the point where an early modern work of interest becomes an oxymoron). The same phenomenon holds in literary discourse as well. While religious and political discourse tended to focus on the *Vedic* golden age, Indologists

and the Modern Sanskrit writers who looked through the Indologist lens tended to focus on classical Sanskrit's apogee in the sixth-century figure of Kālidāsa—an assessment that aligns with Romantic aesthetic sensibilities in the wake of Goethe's valorization of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśakuntalam.* It is not for nothing that Modern Sanskrit writers often refer to their language as "the language of Kālidāsa," probably with greater frequency than any other epithet, including even the classical "language of the gods." As we shall see later in this chapter, Radhavallabh Tripathi's poetry is replete with allusions to Kālidāsa with nary a mention of even the most canonical poets of the later classical period, such as Māgha or Śriharṣa, let alone writers in the immediate precolonial period.

Such is the "logic" of Sanskrit's use as a *lieu de mémoire*. It signals a distant past, before corruption and "foreign" contamination. It borrows the terms of the colonizer to oppose him, and in so doing re-conceives itself. This is not a new observation in the South Asian colonial context. From Gyanendra Pandey's analysis of the "construction of communalism" to Christophe Jaffrelot's examination of the formation of Hindu Nationalism as a process of "stigmatising and emulating" its others (11), there is a well-developed field of scholarly inquiry exploring various facets of this constructed past and its symbols. A detailed history of Sanskrit specifically within that framework awaits, but what what work we have has shown enough to give us a pretty good picture of its outline. What the rest of this chapter will do is not to flesh out that history, but rather to examine a new and distinctive way that one Modern Sanskrit writer, Radhavallabh Tripathi, has undermined some of that logic even as he re-engages and participates in it by remediating the Sanskritic *lieu in Sanskrit*.

It is precisely the gulf between past and present presupposed by the logic of the *lieu* that Tripathi, like many writers of Modern Sanskrit, seeks to trouble, not wanting to consign their

language to empty repetitions of nationhood on the political stage. For the most part, national memories of Sanskrit are not primarily experienced *in* Sanskrit. We find them in the casual intertextuality of everyday speech, in the rhetoric of religion and politics, and in the reflexive literary tradition that continues to draw on images and themes thousands of years old. But when Modern Sanskrit writers engage with the lived experience of such cultural memory in and through the Sanskrit language, something interesting happens. Tensions are brought to the fore. The language is estranged from itself, as are the memories it carries. By translating Sanskritic memories "back" into the language from which they are supposed to have come, writers like Tripathi alter the very structure of memory, language, and identity.

It is important, though, to distinguish what I am discussing from another parallel "modernity of Sanskrit," which Simona Sawhney has named and which others have joined her in discussing. Her discussion begins in a way strikingly resonant with the account I have just given:

> [B]ecause the moment of nationalism itself was often responsible for giving shape and name to the nation's past, and in particular to its "classical" age, that past is now accessible to us only as the past *of* modernity: one that belongs to it and cannot be dissociated from its own projects and preconceptions. (14)

Sawhney's book accordingly "concentrates on instances where modern texts explicitly position themselves as readings or rewritings of early texts, thus exposing the complex relation between the two" (14). Therein lies the impetus for her methodological difference from mine, which (aside from our objects of study) consists of two parts. First, Sawhney conceives her study in terms of the relation between pairs of *texts.* I, on the other hand, am interested in how one language becomes two—the "living" and the "dead"— in a single text. Second, Sawhney is concerned with how to read the past. Her book, she says, "is written as a way of asking how we

might read Sanskrit texts today" (15). I, however, ask how we are to read today's Sanskrit texts.

To illustrate these differences, let's consider an example. One set that Sawhney takes up includes Hindi writers such as Dharamvir Bharati, who deploy in a modern context myths beloved by nationalism. Bharati's *Andhā Yug* (*The Blind Age*) famously rewrites the *Mahabharata* as an allegory for Partition. Such "teleological extrapolation," as Akshay Kumar calls it, "brings the nation-centric postcolonial present in contact with the supranational civilizational past" (31). That notion of "contact" is important to both Sawhney's project and my own, but whereas what Bharati brings in contact are "histories" and narratives, what someone like Tripathi brings together is more fundamental: language and world, or simply two worldviews. Exactly what this means will have to become clear as my analysis proceeds, but suffice it for now to say that he is not simply renegotiating the meaning of a text (neither the Mahabharata nor "Sanskrit" itself conceived textually). Doing that would preserve Sanskrit as a *lieu de mémoire*. Instead he asks whether the textuality of Sanskrit remains available in the way he believes it must—that is to say, wondering whether it must be a *lieu* after all, a ritualized site of remembering that breaks past from present in the name of its preservation. As a consequence, the various memorial functions of Sanskrit are inevitably altered in the process, and we may indeed feel compelled to revisit the living quality of old texts as a result (as Sawhney would have us), but we can also turn our attention to a more distinctly present-oriented creation of the new. We may thus find that nostalgia is innovative and that that innovation is worth thinking in terms that are not bound in referential terms to the past.

4.2 INTRODUCING POET AND POEM: RADHAVALLABH TRIPATHI'S *LAHARĪDAŚAKAM*

So far I have only discussed how Sanskrit has become a *lieu de mémoire* in general terms. I have

yet to show that Tripathi in particular engages with it as such. That is to say, it remains to be seen whether the above sketched framework is a relevant way of approaching this modern literature. To begin, we must meet the poet. Born in 1949 in Madhya Pradesh, Radhavallabh Tripathi is one of the most systematic and active proponents of the Sanskrit language today. A retired professor, he has published many dozens of books in Sanskrit, Hindi, and English, and served as the Vice Chancellor of the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, a nationally funded institute for the propagation of Sanskrit (and since 2002 a "deemed university"—the Indian government's term for a specialized institution of higher learning functioning at a level sufficient to warrant some of the privileges of official academic standing). In 1994, he was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for Sanskrit from India's National Academy of Letters. The focus of the discussion to follow will be a 1986 collection, *Laharīdaśakam* (*Ten Waves*), from which several poems were reworked to form the 1989 book that won him the prize (*Sandhānam*).

Initially published in a first, Sanskrit-only edition in 1986, *Laharīdaśakam* was reprinted in 2003 in a dual language edition that incorporated a Hindi translation and commentary to allow access to a greater audience. As we shall see, this Hindi translation often undoes some of the more subtle memorial work of the original by simplifying complex temporalities and losing the estranging effect of certain of the original's neologisms. I argue that this loss suggests that there is something uniquely productive about the encounter between past and present in a text that self-consciously mobilizes classical imagery and literary allusion to explore and experience the present in a new way. The juxtaposition of the text with its translation (coupled with a commentary that sheds light on the impetus behind certain allusions and metaphors) motivates my choice to focus my attention on the intricate workings of one work rather than spread it more thinly across his much larger oeuvre. My argument is not that this text is "representative" of

Tripathi's literary output, let alone that of Modern Sanskrit as a whole. Rather, my desire is to use this especially self-conscious and meta-poetic work to point to some of the key theoretical and methodological issues that are presented in the study of Modern Sanskrit more broadly, including works that are notably less self-conscious.

Laharīdaśakam, as its title indicates, is a work in ten "waves." Each wave is a thematically distinct set of verses written in a shared meter. As with most classical Sanskrit poetry, each verse can be read as a stand-alone piece but gains when read within a larger context. All of the waves take place "in the modern context," and deal with the issues of modernity as articulated in a classical idiom: environmental degradation read against the pristine nature of Kālidāsa, foreign travel juxtaposed with the journey of Kālidāsa's famous *Meghadūta* cloud-messenger, etc.

This chapter invests most of its attention in the early part of the book, where the first three "waves" (*laharyaḥ*) deal with the sequence of seasons: "Spring," "Summer," and "The Rains." As the Hindi commentary that accompanies the second edition tells us, these poems are meant to portray the specifically modern quality of these seasons.

> In the wave in question, spring in contemporary life is depicted. Departing from the portrayal of spring in traditional poetry, this poet underscores how difficult the reincarnation of spring has become amid the pollution and destruction of the environment. (1)[87]

But it is not only on a thematic level that the depiction of spring is altered. The generic conventions of classical seasonal poetry (*ṛtu-kāvya*) are twisted and stretched so as to convey the

[87] "prastut laharī meṃ ādhunik jīvan meṃ vasant ke anubhav ko vyakt kiyā gayā hai. Pāramparik kavitā meṃ jis prakār vasant ṛtu kā citraṇ hotā hai, us se haṭ kar paryāvaraṇ ke vināś aur pradūṣaṇ ke bīc vasant kā avataraṇ kis tarah kaṭhin ho gayā hai, yah kavi ne rekhāṃkit kiyā hai."

estranging effect of co-experiencing modern spring and its classical textual counterpart. Of the three seasons, spring is especially resonant for the classical reader, and indeed it is there that we shall find Tripathi's most sophisticated engagement with tradition. As will become clear, the very language itself is warped in the process and exploited so as to draw attention to the question of which aspects of the tradition are "alive" and which are "dead," and what that means for the experience of the poet-speaker. The self-reflexivity thus engendered allows us to see the nuanced ways in which cultural memory shapes Tripathi's landscape and vice versa.

Laharīdaśakam's self-reflexivity is by no means new in Indian literary history. As A. K. Ramanujan points out, the Indian tradition has always been one in which "[e]very poem is part of a larger self-reflexive paradigm; it relates to all others in absentia, gathers ironies, allusions; one text becomes the context of others" (*Collected Essays* 15). Not even the anxiety about Sanskrit's obsolescence is new – Yigal Bronner, for example, points to the apparent need of Sanskrit writers to respond to growing vernacular traditions by developing intricate new genres. "When vernacular languages became literary at the turn of the second millennium, some Sanskrit poets responded by using their language to perform tasks that other languages were deemed incapable of performing," especially writing extended works of *śleṣa*, punning narratives that tell separate stories simultaneously depending on how the puns are parsed. Moreover,

> [w]hen Telegu and Tamil finally entered the sphere of *śleṣa*, each in its own way, Sanskrit poets may have responded by trying to outdo them. This may explain the seemingly sudden surge of bitextuality in Sanskrit in the south after an apparent lull between 1300 and 1600 CE. Think, for instance, of bidirectional bitextual poets, invented in the late sixteenth century, exactly when Telugu poets were starting to compose bitextually. (139)

We shall have occasion to return to this parallel below. Nevertheless, there is something unique in the way *Laharīdaśakam* participates in this tradition of reflexivity, and we would do well to note the insights it offers about a specifically postcolonial engagement with cultural memory.

One of the reasons why I want to stress the postcolonial valence of *Laharīdaśakam* is that the structuring themes of language death, modernity, and recuperation are all bound up in (post)colonial discourse. Whether Sanskrit died one thousand years ago, at the moment of colonization, or never, the language of "death" and recovery is very much shaped by the colonial project. I do not want, however, to suggest that *Laharīdaśakam* is primarily concerned with colonialism or imperialism as such. Tripathi's repeated critiques of local government and references to such regional problems as Iraqi oil spills suggest that he is ultimately more concerned with problems of the moment than their relation to a colonial past.[88] Nonetheless, the poem's anxiety about Sanskrit tradition and its concern with specifically "modern" problems situates it necessarily within the postcolonial problematic.[89]

That postcolonial problematic is precisely where the importance of Tripathi's engagement with the memorial function of Sanskrit lies. Part of what Sanskrit does in its common function as a nationalist *lieu de mémoire* is to condense a vast history of diverse places and texts into a seemingly unitary, transparent, and ideal past. We can read *Laharīdaśakam* as participating in the "remediation" of that memorial paradigm, as Astrid Erll puts it, especially in the poem's initial assumption that Sanskrit offers access to memories of a time before the

[88] Though the poem's reference to spring being caught between the "winter of imperialism" (*sāmrājyavādaśiśira*) and the "summer of terrorism" (*ātaṅkavādanidāgha*) shows that Tripathi is not entirely eliding the connection (see verse 26 of the book's first poem).
[89] For an excellent account of how colonialism changed the conceptualization of language in South Asia generally, including the turn toward seeing languages as living things capable of dying, see Mitchell (2009).

"disappearance of spring" and environmental degradation. Erll uses "remediation" to

> refer to the fact that especially those events which are transformed into *lieux de mémoire* are usually represented again and again, over decades and centuries, in different media. What is known about an event which has turned into a site of memory, therefore, seems to refer not so much to what one might cautiously call the "actual event," but instead to a canon of existent medial constructions, to the narratives, images and myths circulating in memory culture.

Laharīdaśakam, of course, is not about an "event" in Erll's sense. Nonetheless, we might say that it remediates a particular vision of what Sanskritic India "was" by drawing together a set of intertextual references in order to participate in the continued construction of a stark opposition between the problems of today and the glory of a pre-colonial golden age. At least initially, the poem suggests an investment in fixing and finding such cultural origins. However, the very act of using the classical language to describe the problems of today carries with it the possibility of undoing the past/present opposition it seeks to portray. By evincing the continued vitality of Sanskrit, Tripathi exposes the problem with neat "Sanskritic" *lieux de mémoire* and points to a different, more productive engagement with memory. Remediation thus becomes a kind of remedy, a therapy for the compulsion to repeat and return, even as it opens up the "origin" for new departures.

For example, in referring to an Iraqi oil spill, the poem alludes to what is perhaps the most famous classical drama in Sanskrit, Kālidāsa's fourth-century play, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*:

> chāyāś caranti kusṛtāḥ piśitāśanānāṃ
> tailena sāgarajalaṃ paridūṣayantyaḥ (12)
>
> [Shadows of flesh-eating demons swarm,

polluting the sea with oil.]

For readers steeped in the Sanskrit literary tradition, these lines cannot help but evoke the passage in Kālidāsa's play when

chāyāś caranti bahudhā bhayam ādadhānāḥ
saṃdhyāpayodakapiśāḥ piśitāśanānām

[…shadows of flesh-eating demons swarm
like amber clouds of twilight… (Miller 120)]

By inserting mythic demons, the infamous *rākṣasāḥ*, into a contemporary scene, Tripathi not only insinuates that these are "degraded times," that we are in the *kali yuga* (the last and most decadent age in the cycle of universal creation and destruction). He also invokes an entire discourse of politics and of the consequences of misrule. In *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, the demons swarm the land because the king is being decadent and selfish in devoting all his attention to lusting after the titular heroine of the play, thereby neglecting his duties as protector of the forest. While I don't want to imply that Tripathi's book just rehashes the politics of the classical age, we would be remiss not to pick up on the implied continuity between past and present. (We shall have occasion to ask *what kind of continuity* later, so for now I note only the minimal extension of past into present via something like analogy or resemblance). The verse reminds us that misrule has always been a problem, even as it also highlights the literality of environmental degradation in our contemporary era. More importantly, the very ability of old metaphors to give such contextually rich meaning to a contemporary phenomenon suggests that any putative break between pre- and post-colonial eras cannot be so strong as to render our memory of the former *merely* of difference and disjuncture.

4.3 FROM SEARCH TO REALIZATION

If we turn now to a close reading of the poem's narrative trajectory, we can trace the development of what it is that Tripathi attempts over the course of the first "wave." In this poem, on spring, the poet's conception of what a season *is* slowly and dramatically shifts, lending to a crucial eventual "realization." At first, he seems to imagine that the external season can and should be understood as literally instantiating (or failing to instantiate) the poetic imagery that tradition associates with it, thereby affirming a nationalist discourse of glorious origins. By the end, however, he has done something better described as internalizing the mood "spring" as a *relation* to the world rather than a factual state of the environment.[90] I shall suggest that the relation he establishes, or more precisely the method for establishing it, points to a view of nostalgia that challenges the influential binary typology of nostalgia put forward by Svetlana Boym.

The text's opening verse already evinces an uneasy juxtaposition of internality and externality.

> śabdā yathā smṛtim upetya punar vilīnā
>
> sīdanti citta-jagati kvacid eka-koṇe
>
> udbhidyate 'tha ca vināśam upaiti sadyaḥ
>
> kāvyāṅkuraḥ kavi-manaḥsu tathā vasantaḥ (1)
>
> [As words approach memory, dissolve,
>
> sink into some corner of the mind;
>
> as sprouts of poetry burst forth,

[90] There is some imprecision in referring to a subject-world relation as "internal," but it usefully suggests an important shift away from the rigorously external focus of the beginning.

and die suddenly, in the mind of a poet – so there is spring.]

This verse raises the question of the relationship between poetic failure and the season's failed arrival. One possibility, offered by the accompanying Hindi commentary, is that there is something about modernity that makes both poetic creation and environmental rejuvenation equally difficult. Degraded times have rendered success ever more difficult.

But this is not the only interpretation. The verse itself conspicuously lacks temporal markers, suggesting that "modernity" may not be the ideal hermeneutic framework within which to read the poem. Even the present "is" that I supply in translation is elided from the Sanskrit, which simply reads, "so spring" (copulas often being tacit in Sanskrit).[91] Moreover, the following verse complicates the relationship further,

uktāv ubhau ca madhu-mādhava-mukhya-māsau
vāsantikīṃ śriyam aho tanutaḥ suramyām
māso madhuḥ sa iha naiva madhu vyanakti
vyatyeti śūnya iva mādhava-māsa evam (2)

[Those two early months, Madhu and Mādhava, are said
to spread forth the sumptuous glory of spring,
Madhu yields no honey now,
and Mādhava passes likewise, empty-seeming.]

[91] It need not, of course, be a copula. The alternative of a parallel verb also suggests itself, but as I will discuss later below, pinning down what such a verb would be is easier said than done. And what is at issue here (now at the beginning of the poem) is precisely the *being* of spring.

The verse not only puns on the names of these spring months,[92] which derive from the word for honey (*madhu*), but also draws our attention to the ways in which the poet's search for spring is conditioned by what is "said" in the tradition and what the language itself suggests etymologically. Also striking is the poet's choice of the word *iha* as the particle to contrast reality from what was "said." I translate *iha* as "now," following both the Hindi translation and the general thematics of the poem, but the word ordinarily denotes spatial placement: "here" or "at this place." This ambiguity is essential, for it is emblematic of the temporality of the poem as a whole. Although the translation and commentary continually posit a temporal break between "now" and "then," the poem itself cleverly eludes such easy distinctions. While we must understand the poem to "mean" *now* at this point in the narrative,[93] the ambiguity suggestively anticipates the breakdown of a naïve conception of cultural memory as preserving pure knowledge of the past untouched by present concerns and interests. Thus we can read the verse as also dividing not then and now, but currently circulated poetic discourse and the lived experience of the poet-speaker.

The poem goes on to explore a number of familiar tropes from classical seasonal poetry as the poet "searches" for the spring. He checks what he sees against the images he has imbibed from literature.

āyāti naiva sumukhī tu rasālakuñje

puñje gṛheṣu bahukṛtyabhare vilīnā

[92] Madhu is a relatively common name for the first spring month, most often called Chaitra. Vaishakha is the usual name for the second, but as Tripathi's commentary points out, there is Vedic precedent for calling the two months of spring "Madhu and Mādhava."

[93] The fact that we are to read "now" into a text that does not actually say it is indicative of the assumptions made about Sanskrit (and reading Sanskrit in particular) that I am more generally referring to as Modern Sanskrit's nostalgia. Only when the original is read nostalgically does the Hindi even "make sense" as a translation of it.

chinna bhavantyatitarāṃ manaso ‘bhilāṣāḥ

śākhā ivāmraviṭapasya kharaiḥ kuṭhāraiḥ (5)

[Lost indoors, amid amassing duties,

a girl’s lovely face comes no more to the mango grove.

The heart’s desires are hacked off –

mango shoots cut by axes.]

The verse is noteworthy for its ability to make sense of the world through classical images even when it wants to *claim* that the world has become unintelligible within that framework. Although the first image does not obtain anymore (the beautiful-faced girl who tends the mango grove, as does for example Shakuntala in Kālidāsa’s famous play), but the effect of its disappearance is still intelligible in terms of a classical image – “mango shoots cut by axes.” However, the poet-speaker seems to take no note of this as yet.

arvāktane kvacana kuñjhaṭipraṇaṣṭaṃ

taṃ mārgaye svasamaye satataṃ vasantam

ā prātar ā niśam ahaṃ bahukṛtyasakto

jighrāmi gandham iva cāsya yadā kadācit (7)

[I search for it, always, in my time – spring,

somewhere nearby, fog-destroyed.

From dawn ‘til dusk, stuck with so much to do –

I can almost smell its scent.]

Like the girl who comes no more to the mango grove, the poet-speaker too is *bahukṛtyasakto* (stuck with so much to do). He still thinks the image of spring and the literal instantiation of it can exist in an unmediated way, without translation, just waiting to be discovered somewhere

"out there."

As the poem progresses we are taken through a series of beautiful images depicting a destitute landscape. The images draw on a dense intertextuality, referring to myth (the famed Trishanku, a king stuck between heaven and earth), classical dramatic texts (Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*), and the tropology of classical poetics itself (punning reference to the structure of *atiśayokti*, or what is often misleadingly translated as "hyperbole"). Eventually, we sense that the construction of these images – images that draw heavily and explicitly on classical rhetorical techniques – begins to give the poet an alternative sense of what spring might be. He goes from claiming that during this spring (of the world) that spring (as a concept) is "gone, vanished" (15) to rethinking spring altogether:

lupto 'pi vikṛtiṃ ca tathā gato vā
śakyas tathā 'nubhavitum eṣa ṛtuḥ kadācit
sākṣātkaromi sahasā purato vasantaṃ
paṅke praphullam aravindasamaṃ lasantam (43)

[Although hidden, perhaps altered,
the season can still be sensed sometimes.
I realize it before me – a sudden, tangible spring:
a new-blown lotus in the mud, glistening.]

The idea of "realization" – here akin to "manifestation" or, more literally, "making [appear] before the eyes" – is a radical break from the earlier "search."

paśyāmi nūtanatanau prakaṭībhavantaṃ
navyāṃ tatheha vasatiṃ parikalpayantaṃ
saṅgharṣayuktajanajīvanacakravāte

taṃ collasantam aniśaṃ bahalaṃ vasantam (48)

[I see it taking new shape,

making a new home,

in the whirlwind of a clashing people—

that great ever-flashing spring.]

The verse itself mimes the movement of its thought: "I see" (paśyāmi) opens the verse, but the object is withheld until the very end—"spring" (vasantam, which I have translated adjectivally in order to preserve the word order). Thus while spring is both an internal potentiality ("I realize it before me") and the "ever flashing" external stimulus that inspires it, it is the movement of the verse that makes its appearance possible at all in the first place. All of these aspects are essential to Tripathi's project, for without the internalization of spring, there is no acknowledgment of the presencing of the past so characteristic of cultural memory, and without externality we lose the grounds for the book's real-world environmental, political, and social critique.

The fact of that critique is important.[94] At the heart of the ambiguities of Tripathi's poem lies a profound skepticism about the state of (among other things) the environment. Actual drought-induced deaths are foregrounded in the poem on summer, "Nidāghalaharī," which highlights the specificity of the events by citing the number of Rajasthani children listed dead in a particular issue of a newspaper. And the internalization of spring in the poem we have been analyzing, while productive in itself, also hints at a genuine problem in the world. The question becomes how to turn back from the internalized spring to the external without losing sight of the insights gained in forsaking an overly literal turn to the past through revivalism. Tripathi notably

[94] I will return to the specific politics of the poem in the final section of this chapter. Now my concern is merely with the fact of there being critique at all.

does not make this second move explicit. The poem suggests rather that there is something in the *process* of "realizing" spring that enables a renewed engagement with the environmental concerns outside.

The refusal to resolve this ambiguity is precisely what makes *Laharīdaśakam*'s nostalgia not only innovative, but constructive. This refusal ought to prompt us to rethink the terms in which we ordinarily discuss nostalgia. Specifically, what I am characterizing as a constructive kind of nostalgic innovation troubles Svetlana Boym's influential distinction between reflective and restorative modes of nostalgia. Playing on etymology, Boym sees in restorative nostalgia an emphasis on *nostos*, the "return home," where the reflective nostalgic emphasizes *algos*, the "longing." Whereas the former wants a literal recuperation of the past, the latter lingers over the pain and does not deny the distance between past and present.

Boym's distinction – while avowedly provisional, marking "tendencies" rather than "absolute types" (41) – risks widening the gulf between temporal and spatial categories that makes nostalgia problematic in the first place. This is first evident in Boym's assertion that, whereas restorative nostalgia "attempt[s] to conquer and spatialize time," reflective nostalgia "temporalizes space" (49). By attempting to collapse temporal distinctions and instantiate the past in *this* or *that* place, the restorative nostalgic seeks to erase time altogether, leaving only space to hold it all together. The reflective nostalgic, on the other hand, experiences space as marked or scarred by time, each place evoking different memories, losses, and possibilities. What I find troubling about this distinction, and what I believe *Laharīdaśakam* offers an alternative to, is its tendency to lose track of the simultaneous efficacy of both time and space as one holistic lived reality. The restorative nostalgic certainly runs into trouble when he/she tries to render time harmless. But reflective nostalgia, as theorized by Boym, has its own roadblocks

insofar as it gets caught up in abstract reflection on time, thereby avoiding the concrete space in which it finds itself and *to which it must respond*. Space seems to exist only as something out of which time and memory emerge, but not as the site of future projects informed by that memory. In its attempt to avoid the spatial abuses of restorative nostalgia, reflective nostalgia runs too far in the other direction and disengages from space except as an abstract field of temporalities. Ultimately, both of Boym's tendencies rely on beliefs about the past-present relationship: namely, whether the past can be instantiated again or whether one admits it to be past.

Laharīdaśakam would disagree. Past and present are both *out there*—not quite brute facts, but realities of a sort nonetheless. The question is how to construct our "here" out of them. The poem suggests on the one hand that there must be literal, concrete instantiation of the nostalgic experience in the poem itself (a kind of "restoration" of the language). Abstract, affective meditation is insufficient. On the other hand, as we have seen, the poem also resists squaring the circle and trying to force the present onto a ready-made template of the past. Hence it nicely disrupts the more sectarian invocations of Sanskrit as the "pure" (*śuddha*) language of Hindu India. Tripathi suggests that both Hindu and Muslim politicians are guilty of the same cheap tactics:

> tāṅgākhya vāhana-gatāś ca hayā vyathante
> rāmasya durbalatarāś ca rahīma-bandhoḥ
> dharmasya raja-naya-kañcuka-saṃvṛtā yad
> rāṣṭre rathāḥ pravicaranti lasat-patākāḥ (28)
>
> [Weak horses hooked to tonga-carts falter.
> Flag-waving carriages tour the nation
> cloaked in the politics of religion –

whether Ram's or Rahim's.]

By writing in Sanskrit, however, and by keeping *both* the spatial and the temporal in (frustrated, ambivalent, productive) play, Tripathi is able to foreground the difficulties and pitfalls of translating the past into present action without thereby forsaking the endeavor itself.

Part of what prevents *Laharīdaśakam* from falling into the reflective/restorative binary is the peculiarity of working with a *lieu de mémoire* that is also a language. Unlike the material that makes up the majority of Boym's analysis, the cityscape and the ruin, "Sanskrit" is not a locatable site in the world. Accordingly, the paradigmatic options available to the nostalgic confronted with ruins—restorative nostalgia's "total reconstructions of monuments" and reflective nostalgia's "linger[ing] on ruins, the patina of time and history" (Boym 41)—present themselves much less dichotomously to a modern Sanskrit poet. However much one may aestheticize Sanskrit as a site of ruins or invoke it as a *lieu de mémoire*, something always exceeds the metaphor when it is actually put to use. That excess lies at the heart of what Tripathi "realizes" when he realizes spring.

4.4 TOWARDS A TRANSLATIONAL SANSKRIT

The claim that Tripathi is attentive to (or, to state it more minimally, that he draws on) that excess may seem to be belied by his explicit investment in *continuity*, perhaps the most consistently recurring preoccupation of the volume. As I will argue across the next several sections, the continuity at issue does not involve the kind of seamless or pure identity that is often associated with nostalgia. Instead, it entails the more complex problem of making "past" and "present" mutually available for new departures. Those scare quotes are crucial, for they signal (however awkwardly) a holding at bay of ontological and epistemological questions in favor of more pragmatic engagement with querying the construction of those two categories.

This section in particular will explore the value of "translation" as a conceptual frame for this analysis.

The "wave" that takes up this theme most explicitly, "Even Now" ("adyāpilaharī"), opens with this introduction in Hindi: "This wave poetically describes the continuity and progressionality of life and world" ['yah laharī jīvan aur jagat ke sātatya aur gatimaytā kā kāvyātmak nirūpaṇ kartī hai']. But it turns out that this rather generic sounding theme is actually much more precise than "life and world" might imply.

Admittedly, the poem opens generically enough. Here is the second verse:

sparśaḥ purā paricito niyataṃ ya āsīt
sañjīvanaś ca manasaś ca rasāyanaṃ yat
lupto 'dhuna jaṭilajīvanajīrṇamārge
'dyāpīha gārbhir iha taṃ ca gaveṣayāmi. (127)

[That touch so assuredly familiar before—
that elixir to enliven the mind—
is lost today on the worn-out road of a tangled life.
Even now, here, I reach out for it with words.]

That he searches "with words" gives an initial specification of the problem, but only with the third verse does the poet really get to the heart of it:

kolālahale 'tra vikaṭe vikalāḥ praṇaṣṭāḥ
śabdāḥ purātanamanīṣijanaiḥ susṛṣṭāḥ
śabdeṣu śabdān militān kilādyān
anveṣayāmi timire navadīpikābhiḥ (127-8)

[Distorted in this monstrous din,

words crafted by wise men of old vanish.
I search the dark for words among words,
look for the primordial with new lamps.]

The problem quite directly concerns words. More specifically, two kinds of words: one lost among the other. Can the old "primordial" words be found again? The question crucially is not epistemological, nor even ontological, but rather methodological, as the next verse clarifies somewhat by repeating the question in other terms. Now what he looks for is a "path" that is "lost amid [his] own new footprints" (128). The words, though, are punning: path is also style (*paddhati*), and footprints are also words (*pada*).

As we shall see later, Tripathi rejects the wholesale adoption of the classical Sanskrit's corpus of standardized themes and tropes. What, then, can it mean to search after styles and words? All three verses suggest an answer that pertains to the ability to go forward. Consider the figurative frame deployed. It consists of two parts: confusion ("tangled," "din," a confusing mess of footprints) and dullness (being "worn out," the need for an "enlivening" elixir). That is to say, the poet is both lost and tired. What is at issue is the ability to "make sense" in both the transitive and intransitive uses of the phrase: to gain an organizing sense of things and then to do something within it that itself "makes sense." The poet wonders if he can find words that allow him to move—words that are not themselves dead. With such phrasing I anticipate Sanskrit's coming into question itself. That will come later in my argument. But for now we need only specify that the "life and world" taken up by *Laharīdaśakam* are inextricably bound up in questions of language, creativity, and livability. Nothing about modernity's valuation is presupposed, therefore. This nostalgia need not entail pre-fixing or prejudging of the present, but can be precisely the means by which the present comes into question.

Tellingly, Tripathi avoids explicitly thematizing Sanskrit's role in all this—neither as site of linguistic continuity, as stable tradition, nor as source of nationhood. In general, he avoids naming Sanskrit entirely. Nonetheless, throughout *Laharīdaśakam*, we find all the trappings associated with that usage of the language. There is the perfected order of all aspects of Kālidāsa's world. There is dismay at the political state of affairs. One verse even arguably sets up the glorious Sanskritic world as caught between Islam ("the summer of terrorism") and the West (the "winter of imperialism") (11). And yet it does not quite come to that. The verse keeps the referents decidedly ambiguous and insists that what is threatened is the present, not the past. And that is precisely my point. This is not the kind of appeal to Sanskrit we are used to in the nationalist context, where "Sanskrit texts appear…as signs of themselves, allegories of (Hindu-Indian) antiquity," and "elicit not reading as much as passion: the love of those who are driven by fidelity to an origin, for whom Sanskrit becomes a prop in the staging of a violent drama of cultural continuity" (Sawhney 4-5). In fact, Modern Sanskrit writing in general is surprisingly (or perhaps not so surprisingly) resistant to the idea that its commitments are to the past. Even a book as clearly "Hindu Nationalist" as Arjunwadker's *Kaṇṭhakānjaliḥ*, which devotes entire sequences to denunciations of the Chinese and of Pakistanis (read: Muslims), can claim that the available political choices are temporally short-sighted, with the Hindu nationalist movements coming under attack for "engag[ing] themselves in unearthing the past only; they condemn the present and the future" (Kantakarjuna 73, translation in original).

In condemning fundamentalist commitments as being "driven by fidelity to an origin," Sawhney both names a real problem and, I think, insufficiently characterizes it. For one thing, fidelity is a notoriously fickle concept, and its not clear we have named the problem of fundamentalism if we simply accept as exhaustive its claims to fidelity. There are many ways to

claim fidelity. I want to suggest that Tripathi's poetry offers a different model than do fanatics who would violently destroy all traces of discontinuity. Rather than abandoning the concept of fidelity altogether, as Sawhney seems to suggest, Tripathi draws on something more akin to the translator's notion of fidelity in order to complicate any too-easy claims to continuity between past and present. For if past and present are indeed in need of "translation," then the fidelity Tripathi strives for in his poetry cannot facilely imagine seamless continuity. Translation requires the performative separation and temporary fixing of source and receiving context. Past and present neither *are* of the "same" socio-cultural substance, nor can be straightforwardly *made* to be so. Instead, in focusing on the need to be faithful to both – to "faithfully" portray contemporary life on the one hand and to do so in a way that is "faithful" to the poetic tradition in which he writes on the other – Tripathi must reconfigure the entire triad of modernity, tradition, and poetic identity. This is so precisely because modernity, tradition, and identity were not stably available beforehand for easy repetition. The resulting reconfiguration becomes its own kind of fidelity, which strives to avoid both the violence of conservative orthodoxy and the rootlessness of an imagined break with the past. Much work remains before we can specify what "faithful" means in this context. (It is not, I want to anticipate, a matter of accurate representation.) What I can assert now, though, is that a translational encounter of past and present *raises* the question of the kind of continuity involved (and indeed whether it is best called continuity and not rather resemblance or contiguity); it does not deny it.

In speaking of this encounter as "translational," I echo Sawhney's own account of the "modernity of Sanskrit." Sawhney suggests that classical texts, because they belong to a "world long vanished," foreground their rhetoricity and disrupt our complacency as readers.

> We are then forced to confront the work as a text and to recognize that its

> language does not offer itself immediately as communication. Texts that are remote from us present this phenomenon most vividly. Their language vividly strikes us as a mode of apprehending the world; the movement of its tropes has not yet been effaced for us by habit or daily use. *We encounter such language in the process, as it were, of translation*: as a language that, in the words of Walter Benjamin, "envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds," instead of forming "a unity like a fruit and its skin." (3-4, emphasis added)

To be "in the process, as it were, of translation," while perhaps theoretically imprecise (what exactly is the force of the 'as it were'?), is nonetheless suggestive for where to turn our attention. As with the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali, the fidelity at issue here demands consideration in terms more closely associated with *process* than *product*. Again we are directed toward sense-making rather than the sense made.

But Sawhney's suggestive account must also be modified to fit our context. Tripathi's Sanskrit is not simply translational for a reader from a temporally distant culture, which is to say, metaphorically. It is also more literally translational to the extent that it uses the correspondence of meaning across languages as a creative force. More precisely, by thematizing correspondence as an unresolved question, Tripathi invites translation into his poem as a necessary constituent of meaning. While it is true that *Laharīdaśakam* was not written first in a vernacular and then translated into Sanskrit, its Sanskrit nonetheless retains the distinctive marks of translation, often assuming specific knowledge of contemporary vernaculars.

This is particularly true in those moments when the ability of the "old" language to access the "new" world is left an open question. Such moments recall Yasemin Yildiz's expanded definition of "literal translation," which includes not only the usual word-for-word

translation of original texts, but also "passages directly written as 'literal translation' [that] do not rely on the existence of an original text, but rather on a reader's recognition of linguistic forms as stemming from elsewhere" (144). In one notable verse of *Laharīdaśakam*, for example, we find this punning play on borrowed neologisms:

> stambhena vidyuta ihātatalauhatantāv
> uttānapādavanamya śiraḥ svakīyam
> vyālambate sa khalu carmacaro vihaṅgo
> vyatyāsam eva sṛṣṭigataṃ vivṛṇvan (10)
>
> [Copper cords of lightning carry
> featherless fliers
> hanging by their feet,
> betraying nature's perversion.]

This verse plays on the literal etymologies of modern Sanskrit-derived vernaculars to "expose" the strangeness of modernity. For example, in Hindi, the word for electricity is *bijlī*, which derives from the Sanskrit *vidyut*. Both words mean lightning, but the Hindi word has taken on the common additional sense of electricity. Likewise the word for wire commonly comes from words meaning "string" or "cord." Because classical Sanskrit lacks words for these modern phenomena, it must draw on such borrowings and neologisms; and contemporary poets regularly do so as a simple matter of course. Tripathi, however, thematizes it. He seizes on the defamiliarizing potential of these moments of translation.

Yildiz clarifies the relationship between these two types of borrowing, which she calls "loan translation" and "literal translation" respectively, by turning to two German terms for "mother tongue," *Muttersprache* and *Mutterzunge.* The former, originally a loan translation from

the Latin *lingua maternal*, has been so absorbed into the language that its "translational origin" has been entirely forgotten. "The latter, on the other hand, loudly announces its difference." Coined by Turkish-German author, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Mutterzunge* is a direct, "literal" translation from Turkish, which, like English and unlike German, allows "tongue" (here, *Zunge*) to mean language. As Yildiz points out, "This in/visibility of translation is the dividing line between 'loan translation' – a widespread form of expanding the lexicon of any language – and 'literal translation' – a potential poetic resource precisely because of its marked eccentricity" (148). Like *Mutterzunge*, Tripathi's *vidyut* announces its difference, even if elsewhere poets may use it unselfconsciously.

That last caveat is important. Tripathi's Sanskrit muddies the distinction a bit between loan translation and literal translation. But Yildiz's account is nonetheless quite helpful in accounting for the cultural work done by Tripathi's estranging "copper cords of lightning." Translational literality in the texts she considers is tied specifically to trauma and its structure of recurrence. While we must take care to distinguish between the literally violent trauma Yildiz finds at the heart of Özdamar's work and the experience of modernity by a relatively successful male Indian intellectual, I argue that Tripathi's work is structured by the discursive violence inherent in the "death of Sanskrit" that I outlined in Section 1 above. That postcolonial "trauma" then finds expression in the translational Sanskrit employed in *Laharīdaśakam*.

There are two additional benefits of expanding and borrowing the discourse of translation to talk about Tripathi's Modern Sanskrit more broadly. One is its conscious effort. The other is its focus on the context of utterance. For Tripathi's translational Sanskrit is neither stumbled upon (tripping over the present language while looking backward), nor a statement "about" the source culture out of which it translates, whether we call that the vernacular present (translated

into Sanskrit) or the classical past (translated into the language of the present). The same could be said of Özdamar's *Mutterzunge*, which is neither an accident of inattention while thinking of Turkey, nor a statement about Turkey. Both *Mutterzunge* and Tripathi's *vidyut* are conscious statements about a translationally, translingually constructed present. We might say it is about co-presenting two languages in one utterance. That they are both capable of being felt and that they do not *finally* conflict, but rather tensionally enable each other might be taken as a good description of what "fidelity to an origin" can mean in a case like this.

4.5 REFERENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF ORIGINS

Conveniently, nostalgia has a habit of calling reference into question. This as true in Sanskrit as in English. If nostalgia loves one figure of speech above all others, it is what we might call a tense deixis. It involves not the contrast between here and there or then and now, but this and "this," where the object of deixis is contrasted with its own empty self.[95] *This* spring—the one I can point at—is actually not spring at all, despite the fact it manifestly is. Let us recall that it is only in the fourteenth verse that *Laharīdaśakam* becomes explicitly nostalgic. We have already discussed how *in general* ambiguation plays two senses of spring off of each other, but only in this verse does the poet lay the contrast bare. We are told now a flagrantly contradictory state of affairs obtains in the world today: "spring is gone this spring" ['vasantasamayaṃ vigataṃ…asmin vasantasamaye' (7).] More precisely, the speaker *sees* that this is so (hence the accusative case).

The figure is worth reflecting on at some length, as it gives us an "indigenous" point of reference against which to locate Tripathi's nostalgia and its particular brand of reference.

[95] Cf. my discussion of such contrast in Agha Shahid Ali's "Postcard from Kashmir" in the previous chapter.

Always a first-person utterance, the figure is ubiquitous not only in Sanskrit but across a wide array of contexts. Consider Attia Hossain's novel of pre-Partition Lucknow and its fading Muslim culture of "decadence" (the word is her orientalism, not mine [125]). At a crucial point midway through the narrative, a character observes to another that "[n]othing as changed," but of course everything has: "I can still see a man's profile in the shape of that peak over there; the same noises come up from the bazaar below; the same human ants move about" (179). What *he* means is that although the world hasn't changed, he has. (He has been abroad in England for ten years). But we readers know more than that, that the novel as a whole is underscoring the fact that even what is the "same" is in fact not.

Sanskrit poets have also loved that same figure, though not necessarily to the same ends. David Shulman has discussed one instance in marvelous detail, taking up an indexical series in a letter voicing the concerns of Kādambarī, who points successively to each part of her body to express its sameness only to struggle with the all-important contextual differences, notably the absence of her love. Shulman calls this nostalgia, and I don't disagree, but a better example is furnished by the counterpoint he himself names, the famous poem quoted by Mammaṭa in illustration of a "figureless" poem that is nonetheless powerful:

> yaḥ kaumāraharaḥ sa eva hi varas tā eva caitrakṣapās
> te conmīlitamālatīsurabhayaḥ prauḍhāḥ kadambānilāḥ
> sā caivāsmi tathāpi tatra suratavyāpāralīlāvidhau
> revārodhasi vetasītarutale cetaḥ samutkaṇṭhate
>
> The man who took my virginity
> is now my husband. These are the same
> nights of spring, the same wind soaked

with Kadamba and jasmine in full bloom.

And I'm still me, the same woman.

It's just that my heart keeps longing

for the love games we once played

there, on the river bank,

amidst the reeds. (Shulman *More than Real* 46)[96]

The verse is certainly among the most poignant and condensed examples of nostalgia in Sanskrit poetry, but we could add others: another verse quoted by Mammaṭa, this time in Prakrit ("taiā maha…" quoted in Chapter 3), or the moment in the third act of Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita* when Sita sees Rama again in the forest but sees him as something that has "ceased to exist for me" (197).

My point in going so deeply into possible intertexts is to stress first that nostalgic tropes and strategies are not new to Sanskrit, and second that, from such a formal perspective, nostalgia can be used for a great many ends. Kādambarī's nostalgia is not the same as the "*yaḥ kaumāraharaḥ*" poet's, nor is Sītā's. Much less is the speech by Hossain's nostalgic colonial returnee functioning within the same discursive universe as any of those three. But all of them, Tripathi included, share a concern with identity, desire, and the passing of time—all articulated through deictic reference to the world around the speaker, which seems to throw the stability of language into question, or rather the meaningfulness of the stability that manifestly does obtain.

Now is an excellent point to remind ourselves of another way in which Sanskrit is not (and never has been) "dead," namely in the artificiality and fixity of its words. While it is true that kāvya tends to retread the familiar rather than break new ground in terms of its objects and

[96] For the rest of Shulman's excellent discussion of this figure see *More than Real* 39-48.

standards of comparison, this observation has sometimes led less careful observers to conclude that Sanskrit deploys a moribund set of fixed meanings, which it at best deploys in ever more complex permutations in search of that ever-elusive thrill of surprised delight (camatkāra).[97] Admittedly, it does not help things that poeticians would take stock examples for their illustrations, simplifying in the case of one passage by Appayya Dīkṣita to a list of how every major figure can be stated as a permutation of face and moon (see early in the *Citramīmāṃsā* discussion of upamā). But the consistent comparison of face and moon never implied that a poet was describing the typicality of the typical (unless of course he was parodying or otherwise playing with convention). And, as the above examples of nostalgia illustrate, the face that is always like a moon is not always like the moon in the same way.

One way of stating the lesson to be derived from what we have seen so far is that this kind of "I am still me"/"Spring is not spring" utterance ought to prompt us to avoid either of two reductions. On the one hand, we could assume that Tripathi's separation of spring from spring is a matter of pure reference; he is talking about an actual then and an actual now (or at least believes he is doing so). In this case, the language (Sanskrit) is entirely incidental to the message. It is at best a symptom, or perhaps a contributing cause in his saying it. On the other hand, we could assume that he is practicing a purely semiotic exercise, appealing to the unity of a system of signs to avoid engaging the messiness of the present. This says that the only thing that matters

[97] I won't rehash a list of bad readers of Sanskrit *kāvya*, but I will note one of the better ones flirting with this mistake: Daniel H. H. Ingall's discussion of Sanskrit's "artificiality" in his introduction to his translation of Vidyakara's anthology. The discussion almost undoes itself as he goes on to admit that some poets are not artificial in this way; or, even better, when he quotes a contrastive example of English liveliness: a few lines of archaic pastoralism that even for an ardent reader of English poetry today may conjure less than many a stereotypical Sanskrit verse (which is not to say that they are bad, merely that liveliness is not guaranteed by anything more than attachment and mode of reading).

about his statement is the play of its language; message is incidental to the coherence of language. If, however, we take the Sanskrit tradition to which Shulman draws our attention as our reference point and treat nostalgia as in some sense "about" the enabling fiction of identity given in language, then Tripathi's statement takes on a wider and more interesting resonance.

But we still have yet to determine *what* has a problematic identity. Spring, yes. But that specifies little, for what does spring mean? It is not sufficient to jump to the end and call it a form of attention or a mode of relating to the world. And the initial answer, that it is "of the past" or even "of the literary tradition" is only helpful, but not exhaustive. What past? What does "the literary tradition" mean here? To answer these questions, we must grapple with the opening verse, the one that names *vasanta* as an issue.

Let us refresh our memory of how it invokes the problem:

> śabdā yathā smṛtim upetya punar vilīnā
> sīdanti citta-jagati kvacid eka-koṇe
> udbhidyate 'tha ca vināśam upaiti sadyaḥ
> kāvyāṅkuraḥ kavi-manaḥsu tathā vasantaḥ (1)
>
> [As words approach memory, dissolve,
> sink into some corner of the mind;
> as sprouts of poetry burst forth,
> and die suddenly, in the mind of a poet – so there is spring.]

The second verse may present the problem *as* a problem (namely that the honey months yield no honey), but this opening does more to set up the metaphorical frame within which that problem makes sense. It does so by means of that most popular of Sanskrit figures, the upamā. Usually translated as simile, the upamā is an act of "measuring against," of taking the matter at hand (say,

a woman's face) and taking stock of it (e.g., in terms of beauty) by asserting that it is (like) an object whose value is well-established (say, the moon). There are therefore four parts that go into making a "full" (pūrṇā) upamā, which is what Tripathi presents us with here: each of the two objects, a shared property, and some word to trigger the comparison.[98] To spell them out, including their Sanskrit names:

- upameya: "spring"
- upamāna: "words" and "poetry-sprouts"
- sādhāraṇadharma: on-again-off-again fickleness
- dyotaka: "as"

The fact that we have two upamāna-s—a fact which earns this upamā the designation mālā, "garland"—should make matters of interpretation that much simpler. The problem, though, is that spring is not typically conceived in such on-again-off-again ways in kāvya literature. We can, of course, supply our own inferences. Perhaps it is the cyclical arising and disappearing of seasons to which the poet refers. But that does not account for the rapidity of change we find exemplified in the upamāna-s. Both words and poetry-sprouts flash and disappear *in the blink of an eye*. The verse tells us so quite explicitly: "suddenly" (or perhaps "immediately" is more precise for the Sanskrit "sadyaḥ"). There are other explanations as well, but they all hinge on trying to make up for the fact that the traditional sahṛdaya (knowledgeable and receptive reader) would not have a ready way to fill in the blank and complete the sentence the poet leaves unfinished. What corresponding verb are we to attribute to spring to make the simile complete?

[98] Not all upamā-s are pūrṇā; many are missing various elements, including the trigger word that would be requisite to qualify as a simile in English, e.g., candramukhī (moon-face) as an epithet of a girl is a stock example of upamā.

Rather than attempt an answer outright, we can observe the crucial mechanism by which this verse works. What is important is that the simile's force comes from pulling the rug out from under the object of comparison and telling us almost nothing about it except its relation to the standards it is "like." Moreover, it does not allow us simply to replace our old notion of spring with a new one. The reference to poetry-sprouts evokes not only the continued focus on spring's natural flourishing but also on the whole tradition of intertextuality that links poetry with flowers, readers with bees, beautiful women with watering, etc. The poem indeed forces us to mobilize all that we know spring means even as we admit that what it means in this simile is both more and less than that.

There is nothing new in the idea that a word might evoke more than it specifically "means" in context. The theory of suggestion (dhvani) that revolutionized the field of Sanskrit poetics also allows that saying, for example, that a village is "on the Ganges" might evoke associations of purity and coolness in addition to its plain designation of location. This, philosophers of meaning contend, is the result of the stumbling block to understanding provided by the grammatical twist of having the village be "on" the Ganges, rather than merely on the shore of it. And yet that example does not quite fit this case. There is no quick paraphrase that could resolve the issue as "shore" does in the Ganges example. The resolution only comes when we have read on and realize what we did earlier in our discussion: namely, that it consciously ambiguates terms. Is spring a time of the year, a state of affairs, or a kind of attention deployed by the poet? We are back where we started.

We have, however, set ourselves up to make two crucial observations. First, spring is an odd upameya. Sanskrit poems generally give *definite* items as upameya-s. An abstraction generally appears under the guise of another figure entirely: utprekṣā (e.g., "the darkness smears

itself on our bodies, like ointment"). Personified traits like "glory" might play a role in an upamā, but doing so requires that the reader agree to consider the object more or less clearly defined. An utprekṣā gives being or form (sambhāvayati) to the unformed, whereas an upamā measures one term against another. Spring is often personified via the love god in classical Sanskrit, so we can certainly accept this verse as not too far from the traditional mark. What remains somewhat strange, though, is that while spring may be locally the upameya in a classical poem, it is far less likely to be the global prakṛta, the relevant "matter" at hand (another occasional synonym of upameya, albeit with slightly different resonance signaling the real "subject" of the verse).

This leads to the second observation, which is less directly related to the verse at hand. Spring and its attendant happenings (blossoming flowers, etc.) is classically the stuff of upamāna-s. Works are traditionally about people and their emotions (bhāva-s), not about nature *per se*. And yet this poem seems to take the classical upamāna-s as its subject in some meaningfully different sense. What is at issue is whether or not the upamāna-s are *there*. Where, though? Not in the world—there was no need that they be "in the world" before, at least not in the poem, since they are by supposition "aprakṛta," not relevantly at hand, not an issue. "In the mind of the poet" begins to answer the question, but it needs elaboration. An upameya is, literally, that which is "to be measured," whereas an upamāna is the thing doing the "measuring." The problem, I propose, is precisely that the poet feels himself confronted with a world that is upameya (to be measured) and yet wonders if he has the tools necessary to complete the measuring, the upamāna-s. This is explicitly a question of value. An upamā is by definition a positive comparison. If one can't find one, the issue of there being any value in the first place is raised. The modern world might be one in which evaluation (and hence value) are unavailable.

That, at least, is a familiar modernist concern.

But Tripathi is not Wallace Stevens.[99] His concerns are not that modernity per se has vitiated our standard claims to value. Death in human terms is not the issue, nor is the Nietzschean death of god. It is bound up with the "death of Sanskrit," as I have been suggesting all along. That is to say, Tripathi in this poem is faced by the fragility of his claims to Sanskrit's vitality. In public statements, he claims that Sanskrit has always been vitally, unproblematically available for him in a way that seems quite at odds with the anxiety we find in his poetry.[100] Of course, the fact that he feels the need to claim it as alive is precisely what is at issue. In such a claim, there is always the possibility that it won't be recognized or that is own work won't make it manifest. That latter concern is what I take to be at the heart of this opening verse. The question is whether the vitality he perceives in the language can take root in his own writing, whether he can participate publicly in Sanskrit's vitality rather than merely witness it privately.

Tripathi's nostalgia is thus a claim for a present, not for a past—a point to which I shall have to return in the next section to articulate what that means in political, factual terms; for now I can characterize what I understand that present in more temporal/philosophical terms. It is emphatically not a present in which "spring" takes on a definite, untroublesome content that can then be left behind. That would be the spring of cliché, a dead metaphor from a dead language. Nor is it the kind of imposed unity (or fantasy thereof) that Derrida would criticize as a fetish for metaphysical *presence*. It is rather a possibility, felt as emerging out of one's understanding of

[99] For recent work on Wallace Stevens' poetic struggles with the problem of valuing in the modern world, see e.g., Altieri *Wallace Stevens and the Demands of Modernity: Towards a Phenomenology of Value.* Stevens is certainly not alone in this concern. I invoke him here merely synecdochically .

[100] See, e.g., his statements here: http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/as-the-river-dries/article6452771.ece

the past (but not out of the past *per se* if by that we mean some fantasy of epistemological and ontological certainty that it was and can be made again to be *just so*).

A counter-example may help bring some shape to these claims. In discussing A K Ramanujan (whose work we examined earlier, in Chapter 1), Jahan Ramazani finds that he too engages in a kind of translational encounter between past and present. Ramazani claims that this encounter is paradigmatic of postcolonial aesthetics in general, especially in poetry, and that it is best captured theoretically by the discourse of metaphor with its frequent talk of "stereoscopic vision" and tension between terms. Specifically, Ramazani finds that the "postcolonial experience is one of twin temporalities, seemingly unrelated, surely unintegrated, yet suddenly bridged, breached, and transfused by unpredictable moments of resemblance" (*Hybrid Muse* 81). The resemblance is of the kind that philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur have carefully captured in all its tense unpredictability (of new meaning) and world-shaping consequence. I am very sympathetic to this characterization, especially as developed by Ricoeur across his work, but especially *The Rule of Metaphor* and the three-volume *Time and Narrative.* But that kind of discussion, particularly as it gets taken up by Ramazani, ends up missing something crucial about *Laharīdaśakam* in particular and Modern Sanskrit in general.

The problem lies in Ramazani's emphasis on "unpredictability." Tripathi, like Ramanujan in the verse Ramazani considers, translates. But Tripathis more specifically strives to "trans-late," i.e., to bear across, for "translation is the mode through which what is dead, disappeared, forgotten, buried, or suppressed overcomes its determined fate by being borne (and thus born anew) to other contexts across time and space" (Brodzki 2007, 6). That is quite a different experience from when

> [t]he traffic light turns orange

on 57th and Dorchester, and you stumble,

you fall into a vision of forest fires,

enter a frothing Himalayan river. (Ramanujan 2011, "Chicago Zen" lines 7-10)

Whereas Ramanujan's Chicago walk turns suddenly, accidentally, and almost violently into a chance-encounter with a lost homeland, Tripathi's search for a Sanskritic spring is slow, deliberate, and effortful.[101] The stumbling of the figure in Ramanujan's poem is a mark of inattentiveness, rather than nostalgic attention.

What this means, though, is not simply a matter of effort. Ramazani has been criticized before for attending only to English-language poetry in his books on postcolonial poetry and transnational poetry, so I won't rehearse that complaint here.[102] There is much value in his work nonetheless, but the difference at play here is almost certainly the result of only considering works by those who feel that their language and their past are alienated from each other (especially those in the Anglophone diaspora), which is a very different problem from the alienation of language and world or an alienation felt to be internal to language as such. Translation has been a guiding word in many postcolonial and diasporic studies, and it figures equally often in the primary literature such studies examine. Most scholarly accounts of this tendency focus on translation as a cross-cultural encounter. Waïl Hassan's (2006) account of "translational literature" is an excellent example of this. Hassan writes,

In the space between translators and translated, there are texts that straddle two languages, at once foregrounding, performing, and problematizing the act of

[101] Part of the reason Ramanujan's encounters with the past are accidental is that his translations are cross-cultural, the unexpected resemblance between two worlds his speaker imagines to be incompatible, or at the very least impossibly far from each other.

[102] See, for example, the introduction to Ignacio Infante's *After Translation: The Transfer and Circulation of Modern Poetics Across the Atlantic*.

> translation; they participate in the construction of cultural identities from that in-between space and raise many of the questions that preoccupy contemporary translation theory. I call such texts translational literature. While all bilingual and multilingual discourse dramatizes the interaction of languages, the texts in question lay special emphasis on translation as an essential component of cross-cultural contact. (754, emphasis added)

Indeed, Hassan is not discussing Arabic postcolonialism but Anglophone writing by Egyptian Arab writer Ahdaf Soueif. But what Tripathi presents us with is another kind of translational literature, one that remains curiously intra-cultural—it is translational from a position resolutely within a multilingual context. But I do not want to claim for the poetry some closed unity of culture within which it can be called "intra." The most essential component of this translational literature is the contact between a memorial image and the world to which it is supposed to bear some predetermined relationship, which is to say it that "culture" is anything but taken for granted, either as a singular or plural entity.

Therefore the resemblance between one culture and another is not available to find even consciously by Tripathi, let alone "accidentally" as in Ramazani's Ramanujan. Such a resemblance actually requires a great deal of pre-fixing of language and culture. In the poetry of Ramanujan, for example, we often find a generic "East" represented in such moments of translation: "frothing Himalayan river," "monkey temple," even just "the Indies, the antipodes" ("Chicago Zen"). That is to say, the stuff of anything but a living or livable language of the present (which is precisely the point of Ramanujan's poem).

That raises another significant change or challenge Tripathi's poem raises for standard accounts of postcoloniality and its poetry, at least as articulated in the study of anglophone

poetry with its diaspora-heavy concerns. For effort *per se* is not all that distinguishes *Laharīdaśakam* from the paradigmatic postcolonial engagement with the past; it is also the end to which that effort is directed. Discussing diasporic consciousness in postcolonial poetry, Rajeev S. Patke (2006) writes,

> The voice of the poem records the struggle of a person twice dispossessed: of home and memory. The language enacts the effort required to learn a new skill: memory. Remembering the past is like learning a foreign language, translating thoughts into new sounds and hieroglyphs. Language itself is a foreign experience, an estrangement from feelings and ideas that has not found the forms in which to express them. (170-1)

The suggestiveness of this passage in relation to *Laharīdaśakam* – in its foreign(izing) language, in the effort of memory – is tempting. Nonetheless, we must be careful not to forget that *Laharīdaśakam* is a resolutely presentist poem. It is not that Tripathi wants to remember what it was like "back then." Instead, he calls on the language of memory to help articulate the present.

Of course, efforts to remember are themselves located in the present, and for that reason existing analyses of postcolonial remembering can be useful even in the quite different context of Tripathi's memory-translated present. Patke continues his above analysis of the effort to remember by commenting on Ania Walwicz's poem, "Poland" – "The poem localizes the idea of home as a country of the mind, a fictional space masquerading as a real place. 'Poland' treats the past as the utopia (literally 'no-place') from which migration took place" (171). Tripathi's past, like Walwicz's Poland, can be thought of as a fictional past "masquerading" as a real past, a place in his mind out of which the present becomes intelligible. What Tripathi's work illustrates so nicely is the process of coming to terms with the fictional nature of the masquerade without

abandoning the tremendous descriptive power it offers. However, we must be careful in speaking in this way of not falling prey to naïve conceptions of "fiction" or "masquerade." A metaphor is not a lie, and a fiction is something less than false. I am inclined to follow Ricoeur in considering what we are calling masquerade to be rather an attempt at re-description. The origins of Tripathi's poetry (i.e., the origins it constructs for itself as points of departure) become thus a kind of "seeing as" wherein both what is *seen* and what it is seen *as* are changed in the tense encounter, leaving a "semantic surplus" around which further interpretations of the world center.[103]

4.6 INTERROGATING IDENTITY

My claim that Tripathi's translational encounter with the past is present-oriented (his is a reception-oriented translation theory, we might say) might seem to invite rebuke of nostalgia talk altogether. If he is more concerned with the present, why call it nostalgia? And to the extent that he *is* concerned with the past, why not just call it cultural memory—a term I have myself already had recourse to in this chapter? After all, Sanskrit itself has no word for nostalgia. I don't mean simply that it lacks a word for the historically distinct meshing of public and private narrative that Peter Fritzsche and others tell us developed in nineteenth-century Europe. Sanskrit's many words for desire, loss, and sorrow do not map well onto even the simplest of English definitions of nostalgia, such as the desire for a past state of affairs.

At the broadest level, I want to suggest that the discursive horizon of the (denied) death of Sanskrit makes poetry such as Tripathi's in some minimal sense *inevitably* nostalgic. But I

[103] Tripathi seems quite aware of the force of this "seeing as," acknowledging the humorousness of it in a series of gently self-ironizing verses in another poem in the volume, where he goes on his first trip abroad on an airplane, imagining each aspect of the journey in comically inappropriate classical terms.

also have a simpler, more immediate answer: because we (as readers) must want and love (or read as if wanting and loving) the past in order to make sense of the poem in the first place. "Want" and "love" are both used provisionally here, suggesting a certain positive affective investment, a desiring involvement in text and world. I return once again to the opening verse by way of specifying this claim.

We know by now that it ambiguates spring in two crucially different senses. First, the contrast between two springs, one expected and one found ("spring is gone this spring"). And second, the nature of the difference between those two; i.e., is the other sense an elsewhere, an elsewhen, or some other else entirely? The latter ambiguity has dominated the discussion so far, but the former deserves a bit more attention.

As we have seen, the opening verse works by taking what is historically its most overdetermined element, vasanta (spring), and using a simile to render it newly underdetermined. Spring is, of course, absolutely ubiquitous in classical Sanskrit poetry. From mahākāvyas, which formally "require" description of the seasons, to dramas that use it to set the mood and mark time's passing, spring is everywhere, and everywhere it means the "same" thing: love, beauty, youth, and unspecified desire. But here it simultaneously means all of those and none. And it does that by means of that ambiguation: what the word *seems to* or *should* mean against what as a matter of fact it does mean in the object before me. The fact that the simile does not complete itself by elaborating the "spring" clause is more than a mimesis of spring's failure to manifest stably (though it is that, too). It also produces the space for that ambiguity to grow and productively sustain itself across the next set of verses until we come to the explicit contradiction of a not-spring spring.

There remains, though, a further specification of that ambiguity. For it seems to me more

than a slippery continuum of meaning. It is rather a kind of pun, simultaneously meaning two quite distinct things. In other words, the poem is, in an important sense, an example of "bitextuality" in Yigal Bronner's sense of the term, namely an extended use of *śleṣa* to tell two stories simultaneously. Now, while medieval and early modern poets may have used this technique to tell two quite different stories, as in the case of the twinned *Mahābhārata/Rāmayaṇa* retellings, "Vasantalaharī" uses it for a much more subdued purpose: telling two versions of the same story leading to an ultimate synthesis in the realization that they are in fact one story after all. And yet even that is perhaps too bold a statement of what this poem does, since there aren't very many overtly punning verses in precisely the sense I am describing. In fact, most of the puns that the commentary calls attention to as instances of *śleṣa* are about other matters entirely, such as the following:

> [I will insert an example and very brief explanation of it here. I haven't decided which example will illustrate my point most clearly]

Nonetheless, I believe the *śleṣa* tradition is useful for thinking through this particular poem's originality. This is so for a number of reasons and despite the fact that the poet himself likely never thought of the association (likely not even holding it unconsciously, I might add, give his colonially-influenced conception of the classical, which bypasses the major *śleṣa* poems in favor of the earlier and simpler Kālidāsa). Not least of those reasons is that Modern Sanskrit is likely to come under fire for many of the same reasons that the *śleṣa* poets did under the gaze of the colonial Indologist, namely that it is artificial and unnatural, an "incredible and incessant torturing of the language." So says Satya Vrat Varma on the *śleṣa* poet Kavirāja (quoted in Bronner 10), but I can easily imagine someone saying something similarly haughty and dismissive of Tripathi's verses about airplanes and smog. Indeed, it is in some respects to such

presumed detractors that Tripathi writes *vasantalaharī.*

More than its superficial, but important parallels in scholarly attitude, it is *śleṣa*'s conceptual framing that helps us characterize what Tripathi's poem does, for it forces us to expand the horizon beyond the most explicitly ambiguous verses and to see the ambiguity quite consciously stretching over even seemingly straightforward verses of what is called in Sanskrit poetic theory *svabhāvokti*, "saying it like it is." Secondly, the conceptual framework of *śleṣa* also draws our attention to an important historical parallel in the history of Sanskrit poetry's innovations. Finally, it provokes an important question about the relationship between the two meanings in Tripathi's poem, one that fascinated and plagued theorists across the figure's history. More precisely in Tripathi's case, it forces us to ask just what the nature of those two meanings are and whether that particular duality of meaning has ever before appeared in Sanskrit literature.

But lest we get ahead of ourselves, we must begin with the first insight gained: expanding the dual-meaning approach beyond "iha" and the lightning-bat verse. Or rather, establishing that those verses *do* constitute a kind of *śleṣa* to expand out from. Having spent a good deal of time already on the *iha*, let's turn to the bats and their lightning. How can we read this as *śleṣa*? To remind ourselves, here is the Sanskrit:

stambhena vidyuta ihātatalauhatantāv
uttānapādavanamya śiraḥ svakīyam
vyālambate sa khalu carmacaro vihaṅgo
vyatyāsam eva sṛṣṭigataṃ vivṛṇvan (10)

Tripathi's commentary mentions nothing about *śleṣa*. It says simply, "In the bat, a description of creation's perversion is made possible, therefore the figure *utprekṣā* is suggested" ['camgādaḍ

meṃ sṛṣṭi ke vyatyās ko nirūpit karne kī sambhāvnā kī gaī hai, ataḥ utprekṣā alaṃkār vyaṃjit hai' (10)]. That remark immediately prompts two questions: why is it only "suggested" (*vyaṃjit*) and by what means does the suggestion take place? For "suggestion," *vyañjanā* is a technical term in Sanskrit poetics for the capacity of language to mean more than is explicitly stated. To answer these questions, we must first consider what *utprekṣā* normally is when it is stated explicitly (i.e., when it is vācya not vyaṅgya).

This commentary's description clearly echoes Mammaṭa's canonical definition of *utprekṣā* as "the making-possible of the matter [at hand] by means of a similar [thing]" ['saṃbhāvanam athoprekṣā prakṛtasya samena yat' (10.6)], which refers essentially to the concretizing of an abstraction by means of a parallel. Mammaṭa helpfully cites an example: "darkness smears the limbs" ['tamo limpatīva aṅganāni'], wherein the 'pervasion' (vyāpana) of darkness is 'made possible' (sambhāvita) by means of the concreteness (rūpatā) of the act of smearing ointment across the body. In other words, a concrete gesture (smearing) makes the spread of darkness tangible and hence "possible" for us to conceive. Or, in our present case, the bat gives tangibility to the abstract phenomenon, perversion.

That all seems rather straightforward, with no need for the commentary's specification that the figure is "suggested." There are, however, two idiosyncratic features of this verse from the perspective of *utprekṣā.* First and most apparently, the figure is usually accompanied by the word *iva*, like, or as it is ubiquitously translated by early translators, "as it were." So we can imagine that the commentary merely wants to emphasize that we are to infer such a word from the verb "reveals." But there is also the second curiosity in that *utprekṣā* generally entails "the fanciful, imaginary nature of the object of comparison" (Shulman, *More than Real* 56). But a bat is not fanciful in the same way as a darkness able to smear itself on people or as a mountain

acting as a woman's breast for a cloud to rest on.[104] In fact, the verse simply does not make sense if we accept that it is only about a bat, as the Hindi suggests. What is perverted about a bat hanging on a wire? Certainly nothing more than a bird alighting on a house. I suggest that the verse only makes sense *as utprekṣā* if we take it to be about a bird—in other words, if we take it also as an instance of *śleṣa*.

Working under that assumption, the verse unfolds as a series of dual meanings: *vidyut* as electricity/lightning; *tantu* as cord/wire; *carmacara vihaṃga* as bat/featherless bird. This last pun works because the Sanskrit etymologically signifies a "skin-moving sky-goer." Now there is some real perversion: a featherless bird dangles wrong-side-up from a metal cord of lightning. Given my discussion of this verse earlier in the chapter, this conclusion is not shocking, but now we have the conceptual apparatus to understand its reverberations elsewhere in the poem. If we read this verse as an instance of a persistent *śleṣa* running through the poem, we can conclude that the two meanings in any given verse are to be expected to work on an ordinary, mundane level and on a fanciful level. We might expect, moreover (though we need not conclude therefore), that the fanciful level will pertain to strict adherence to classical norms (birds and lightning are the stuff of poetry, not bats and electricity) and to the "origins" of the expression (whether etymology, historical source, or otherwise). This verse also suggests that the fanciful meaning is born of a kind of (nostalgic) desire on the part of the poet—one only sees the bat as a bird if one wants the world to be the stuff of classical poetry.

This is all very suggestive, but I must extend the discussion beyond the context of the obviously punned verse if I want the interpretation to hold. Here is a more or less random half-verse from the first half of the poem: "Smoke-enshrouded faces of those on the road / gulp down

[104] The latter is Shulman's example from Kālidāsa's *Meghadüta*, see *More than Real* 54-55.

the polluted wind" [‘dhūmavṛtāni vadanāni tathādhvagānāṃ / vāyuṃ pradūṣaṇayutaṃ nigiranti bhūyaḥ’ (7)]. On the surface, there is no reason to read this bitextually. The scene is familiar enough to anyone who has spent time in the polluted urban streets of developing Asia. But if we strain—if we follow the poet himself and listen nostalgically for classical resonances—we might begin the verse a bit more hopefully. The traveller, the smoke, the face—any and all of these are familiar to the classical Sanskrit idyll, whether the hermitage of Śakuntalā or the pastoral scenes of later poems from the *Subhāṣitaratnakośa*.[105] Romila Thapar, for example, reminds us that the "smoke ris[ing] from the sacrificial fires of the ṛṣis" is part of what makes Shakuntala's hermitage "the epitome of gentleness, harmony, and peace" (51), which itself is meant to heighten the eroticism of the encounter with Shakuntala's face. Hearing this resonance, of course, *is* a strain on the poem, but a strain is precisely what it asks of us.

From the beginning, we have been told that spring is a fickle presence: it flashes forth and then disappears, like *le mot juste* that haunts poets, just out of reach (1); the speaker feels "as if" he scents it out on the wind (4). He is quite consciously searching for the spring, and I believe we are to see it briefly in that first *pāda* (quarter verse) before the image is stolen from us (and the poet) in the second. That is precisely why the second line is successful (if indeed it is) in making the reader feel the weight of the nostalgic grief. Otherwise, the line is just in the present, here and now, and we have no reason to be anything more than annoyed at the smoke, just as the

[105] For the latter, see for example, verses 196, 302 and 303. These Pala dynasty-era pastoral poems are probably the strongest late-classical precedent of "Vasantalaharī," especially as they turn their attention away from perfection to focus on aestheticized suffering and imperfection. Verse 304 by Vaishya is an especially strong example of this. I have emphasized the early classical precedents in Shakuntala because those are the most clearly marked in the poem as constitutive of the meaning of the poem, but verses such as Vaishya's may have a quieter enabling presence as well, especially when Tripathi approaches the landscape with more affection and hope as at the end of the poem or in the early portions with the fisherman and the grandfatherly Vindhyas.

average commuter is.

We might, therefore, want to soften my earlier claim that the poem is an extended exercise in strict bitextuality. Instead, but equally crucially, the poem can be seen to create two levels of *possible* meaning, which only occasionally rise to the surface as co-articulated in actuality. The dual layer of possibility and the nostalgic desire that drives the movement from one to the other is the motor driving the poem's forward movement. And it appears in a variety of ways, perhaps most saliently in the tension between spring as figure and spring as mundane season.

This, therefore, is the motivation for appealing to the critical framework of "nostalgia" rather than cultural memory: the poem is far more concerned with *how* memory's affective purchase on our lives shapes and enables different ways of engaging the world than it is with *what* memories seize us. In a sense, this threatens to put us outside of "memory" altogether in terms of disciplinary investment. As Astrid Erll points out, "Across the disciplines there is a general agreement that 'remembering' is a process, of which 'memories' are the result, and that 'memory' should be conceived of as an ability" (*Memory in Culture* 8). Jan Assman goes so far as to gloss "memory" as "reference to the past" (2). If my reading of *Laharīdaśakam* insists on the irrelevance of "memories" and past-oriented reference as distinct concerns for the poem, I seem to banish both remembering and memory from the theoretical framework available to me. And yet I find that "nostalgia" (as theoretical framework) reintroduces cultural memory under a new guise. Now the past is not the object of reference, but the deliberate means of reference (remembering, of course, that reference is transformative and excessive rather than stable and

univocal).[106]

I said earlier in this section that the conceptual framework of *śleṣa* highlights some productive historical parallels as well. Now I am in a position to name them. Bronner's take on the development of the figure, as noted earlier, involves an anxiety about Sanskrit. What kind of "specialized niche" can Sanskrit make for itself to inhabit amid the potentially overwhelming "rise of regional literary languages?" Bronner suggests bitextuality was one solution (133). That solution entailed a massive project of working and reworking the language by developing lexicons and other means for writing extensive *śleṣa* poems that were not easily (if at all) replicable in the vernacular at that stage in their literary-historical development.

While the lack of clear reference to this prior boom by Tripathi prevents me from saying that he is participating in that "tradition" of anxiety and language-reform, I believe the historical parallel is real, albeit now in an exaggerated form. Sanskrit is perceived to be under much greater threat than ever before. It seems at times that Sanskrit has no role in the contemporary world. The poet can wonder if he hasn't lost the old road amid his own footprints, which go every which way: into the vernacular, into Sanskrit, and into silence. As a result, he is left exploring what the uniqueness of Sanskrit could be *as a linguistic medium*. Here it is worth reminding ourselves, following Sheldon Pollock, that languages, especially literary languages, "never exist as pure, self-identical, thinglike isolates, but are instead processes, in fact, mutually constitutive process" (Introduction 15). What is at stake in work such as Tripathi's is the very being of

[106] This particular use of memory is not foreign to memory studies. In a famous passage, Maurice Halbwachs spoke of his experience arriving in London with the baggage of Dickens' novels he carried with him in his memory. The books he had read prefigured the city and shaped his experience, and "so," he says, "I took a walk with Dickens" (quoted in Erll, *Memory in Culture* 169). Halbwachs, though, is only interested in this as an argument for memory being "shared" among author and readers.

Sanskrit in the postcolonial world?

4.7 THE POLITICS OF REALIZING NOSTALGIA

My investment in this chapter has been in suggesting that nostalgia can be constructive in a way not generally acknowledged. That is, it can be unpredictably innovative, and it need not deny that innovation simply "out of nostalgia." A secondary claim that arises from this is that there is nothing to guarantee nostalgia's conservatism in any sense stronger than a refusal of discourses of radical breaks with the past. While Sanskrit is often deployed in politically disturbing ways, we do not adequately characterize those ways by naming their nostalgia, for not all Hindu-nationalist appeals to Sanskrit are nostalgic, and not all Sanskrit nostalgias are Hindu nationalist. In this closing section, I want to go deeper into the politics of Tripathi's poem. My goal, however, is not to characterize in any exhaustive or even locally precise way the specific interventions Tripathi's work does or claims to do. Rather, my more modest aim is to establish that the secondary claim about nostalgia's progressive potential does indeed *follow* from the primary claim that nostalgia is or can be constructive and innovative.

It would for that reason be relatively trivial to list thematically the points where Tripathi's poetry is new or progressive. There is nothing stopping anyone from writing in Sanskrit, and nothing stopping them for using it for any purpose. If an idea or an impulse can be conceived, it cannot be excluded *a priori* from the language. There should therefore be little surprise in one work's innovations—not at least the kind of surprise that demands immediate historical stock-taking. It would, moreover, be misleading to parade Tripathi's or anyone else's Sanskrit verse as an example of how Sanskrit is a "progressive" language, if by that we meant an inevitable force for progressivism. Counterexamples would flood the desk of anyone looking to prove that. What *is* interesting and important is that even being nostalgic in Sanskrit need not lead to cultural

revanchism or stifling stagnation. Structurally, formally, Sanskrit offers the avenues out of itself as a *lieu de mémoire* precisely when it is engaged in some of the most nostalgic ways. That is to say, I must establish not that only there are innovations, but that they are specifically nostalgic.

Although a list of themes is no end in itself, it still provides a rich starting point from which to proceed. What is important is that our focus is not on political claims themselves but on how they emerge out of and are enabled by nostalgic engagement with language, form, and tradition. One thing that stands out to me in reading "Vasantalaharī" is a small moment in the background of an unremarkable verse which in its foreground wonders in a now-familiar way whether spring still exists. The verse quite conveniently conjures up all the same images and language as the opening:

> śabdeṣu teṣu bahuleṣu supuṣpiteṣu
>
> prollāsivāgvipulapallavite vitāne
>
> rūḍhāṅkureṣu nagare navasaṃskṛtīnām
>
> ābhāsa eva kimu śiṣyata eṣa cāsya (12)
>
> [Among all the flowering sounds
>
> in a field blossoming wide with words aglimmer,
>
> among the established sprouts of new cultures —
>
> is all that remains of it mere semblance?]

What stands out, though, is the plural: cultures. Although this verse seems to set them up as an antagonist of "it" (spring), we know that the ultimate answer to the question is no, it is not mere semblance. It is precisely *in* all of that diversity that spring resides. Thus the poem casually affirms the plurality of *saṃskṛti*, that most sacred word of cultural nationalism.

Lest we dismiss this as a slip of the pen (or metrical filler), another verse affirms the notion more positively, when it finally locates the object of desire:

paśyāmi nūtanatanau prakaṭībhavantaṃ

navyāṃ tatheha vasatiṃ parikalpayantam

saṅgharṣayuktajanajīvanacakravāte

tam collasantaṃ aniśaṃ vasantaṃ. (10-11)

[I see it taking a new shape,

making a new home here

in the whirlwind of a clashing people—

that great ever-flashing spring.]

"A clashing people," for that matter, need not require the additional article, "a," when rendered in English. "Clashing people" is certainly a more liberal foundation for nationhood than timeless unity, but there is also nothing to prevent the compound from being read to offer a less inclusive vision: "the whirlwind that is the life of a people bent on fighting." That more pessimistic-sounding reading, however, does not mesh with the thrill of discovering a new spring. More tellingly, the poem never mentions nation or nationhood, it is much more resolutely focused on the small things: the village girl who "comes no more to the mango grove" (3), the sweaty laborer with shovel in hand, and the wife in her turmeric-stained kitchen (19).

That last list of romanticized figures might raise the critical hackles of some readers, but I want to keep the focus on the nexus of language, nostalgia, and innovation for a bit longer. If Tripathi is nostalgic, as I claim, what is he nostalgic *for*? Much of my dissertation's

argument hinges around destabilizing and reformulating that question. The ready-made formulation so often wants to jump the gun and get to *the* point of the text and its desire, which seems to miss so much. But I will entertain the question for a moment here. We can say definitively the nostalgia of *Laharīdaśakam* is not for a world gone by. The affirmation of the present is too strong, and the poem pays no attention to the past per se. Nor is it for a way of writing. Tripathi tells us explicitly,

> kāvyāṅgaṇam samavatārayituṃ samīhe
> sarvaṃ purātanam idaṃ nahi varṇyajātam
> tyaktvā camatkṛtitatiṃ pratibimbakalpāṃ
> vāsantikīṃ viśadayantu giro madīyāḥ (47)
>
> [I do not want to bring that whole old poetic system
> that I have been describing down.
> Having abandoned that mass of correspondence-like *camatkāra*
> may my words scrape clean [the glory] of spring.]

The technical term, *camatkāra*, is the tradition's word for the sudden burst of delight and surprise that attends the reading of well-figured poem,[107] but in this case the important thing is that Tripathi does not want to inherit the clichés only to revive them with various surprises of combination and permutation. In other words, he doesn't want to keep rewriting the same basic poetry.

One could simply give up and say that the poem is not nostalgic for anything, but rather

[107] The word itself is onomatopoeic, referring to a "camat" sound of some kind that accompanies that pleasure. Raghavan believes it is the sound of someone smacking their tongue in relish over their food. Shulman believes it to be closer to the clicking of the tongue that expresses approval at a particular performance.

works through and rejects nostalgia. But that too is unsatisfactory, not least because one poem should suffice for that, and yet Tripathi and his Sanskrit cohort continue to produce much more than that. The alternative that I put forward is that Tripathi's nostalgia is for a mode of apprehending the world. Or rather, his nostalgia asserts that his way of seeing and articulating the world is not obsolete.[108] And his way of apprehending the world is *both* "the old way" (i.e., in Sanskrit) and newly nostalgic. Sanskrit itself simply "is" nostalgic when approached in this way. We noted this much earlier in the chapter when we discussed how Sanskrit arrived at its current role as a *lieu de mémoire*. To write in a dead language is to write doubly: a living and a dead half, as it were. Nostalgia affirms both and in so doing can't help but innovate, for the two never quite coexisted like that before.

To return one last time to that opening verse, we see that it contains the workings of the whole poem. Spring is a productively elusive creature. It is active—*words* approach memory, not the other way around. Tripathi, after all, sees the kavi (poet) in ways entirely consonant with the Vedic ideal of the ṛṣi (seer).[109] But the poet nonetheless is not entirely passive, since seeing and seeking are actively constitutive of the experience. The reader, too, experiences something of this when she makes sense of the disjuncture in the opening simile. She can *almost* see how spring is like words coming to mind, but drawing the connection requires weighing tradition against one's understanding of the world and finding it impossible either to call the two commensurable or to reject the measurement entirely.

Nostalgia across the poems of *Laharīdaśakam* can be a source of pathos (over environmental destruction), anger (over government ineptitude and corruption in handling a

[108] The threat posed by the "lightning wires" is not in fact that the world has become perverted, but the tools for seeing, understanding, and speaking about it have lose their access to it.
[109] For more on this connection, see his discussion of poetic creation in *Kāvya aur Kāvyaśāstra.*

drought) or humor (the traveller who can't help but see an airplane as a Kālidāsan elephant). But in all cases, the result emerges out of a conspicuously nostalgic desire to co-experience present and past in a moment of mutual constitution. The village girl whose tasks indoors have multiplied and whose duties no longer take her to "mango groves" only appears under the guise of a traditional convention of erotic scenes that require the opposite.

This is not to suggest that the poem—and Modern Sanskrit literature more broadly—is politically perfect. There are many reasons for readers to object. Gender remains an overwhelming problem. Writers remain overwhelmingly male, and their vision is predominantly paternalistic.[110] The wife and daughter here become figures, along with the farmer, of renewed connection to spring and hence to Sanskrit. On the one hand, we can be grateful that, unlike so much nationalist mobilization of women, this paints them neither as victims in need of protection or revenge (e.g., as Mother India) nor, strictly, as guardians of tradition. On the other hand, the greatest challenge facing a modern writer in Sanskrit would be to negotiate what it means for so much of kāvya imagery and imagination to rely on sedimented feelings about women and not on actual women's feelings. Even more pertinently, we might observe another line of critique that would object to the consistent return to the government as the legitimate site of grievance and expected redress, re-legitimizing the current nation-state formation. This objection, however, even more obviously than the last, makes clear that these problems arise not out of nostalgia but *contemporary* political formations and their ideological foundations.

[110] And those writers who are women are not necessarily advancing feminist or anti-caste positions. See, e.g., Kṣamā Rao's thoroughly "Sanskritized" biography of the bhakti saint Tukaram (taking Sanskritization here in its common meaning of assimilation to Brahminical norms).

CONCLUSION

At the largest disciplinary scale, I have sought with this dissertation to move conversations in postcolonial literary studies away from their recurrent interest in representation, with its implicit reflection/consolidation of (often national) objects of desire. Instead, I have proposed to advance discussion along lines attentive to the local affective movements of particular texts within and across language lines. In doing so, I have tried to show that often the objects of postcolonial desire are far less fixed than has been supposed in previous analysis. Specifically, in the case of the past discovered in postcolonial nostalgia, that past is not given as a discrete object *for* nostalgia; rather, it emerges as the obverse of a present brought into (often political) question.

As one specific strategy for moving away from representation, I have proposed that postcolonial literary studies pay more attention to genres other than the novel, which is now so firmly entrenched in debates about national representation that escaping the pull of those debates is all but impossible. More particularly, I have suggested that Anglophone postcolonial poetry's close relationship to local, non-Anglophone literatures tends to thwart any attempt to assimilate that poetry to overarching, large-scale political projects like "narrating the nation" or "writing back." Instead, postcolonial poetry (Anglophone and non-Anglophone) invites us to consider the ways in which texts question and explore the liveliness of specific genres and languages for use in the present, whether politically or otherwise.

In raising the question of the "liveliness of specific genres and languages," I am not pointing to an empirical or theoretical problem. Empirically, one might wonder whether texts are being written in such-and-such a genre. Theoretically, one might ask—as has often been asked—whether "authentic" Indian literature can be written in English. The issue that has interested me, however, is aesthetic, and it is internal to the particular texts that raise it. That is to say,

individual poems may be seen to work through and explore the capacities of "their" tradition (a tradition constituted in the work of the poem) to continue into the present.

In the case of English, for example, I have shown how poets of the postcolonial generation in India faced a language seemingly frozen by the colonial encounter in a moment of Oriental Romanticism, where to write in English simply "meant" to write of "skylarks and nightingales," according to the young Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. That meaning, of course, is not necessary. Native speakers of English in the United States, for example, are unlikely to feel their language thus frozen. Nonetheless it presented itself as a problem for these poets, who needed to overcome it and in so doing to reproduce it as a problem overcome (i.e., by writing in their revitalized English they produced and reinforced the idea that "skylarks and nightingales"—and all the linguistic tics that go with them—are a thing of the past).

In the case of Sanskrit, I have shown how one recent poet, Radhavallabh Tripathi, used the seeming frozenness of his language as precisely the source of its present power. By playing on the tension between the language's connotative pull toward the past and its attempts to speak denotatively of the present, Tripathi's work undermines dogmatic attempts to claim the past for communitarian solidification while still keeping open the productive yearning his awareness of the past brings him.

By placing these two languages beside each other, I therefore also draw attention to a parallel that has been overlooked in South Asia studies so far, namely that both languages became entwined at the same time and by the same forces, namely, through the project of Orientalist translation during the early colonial period. In the postcolonial period, writers in both languages then faced the problem of how to find life in seemingly dead languages (albeit dead in different ways—Sanskrit in supposedly absolute terms, while English was only stifled by too-

close association with a particular body of work and a specific, colonial mode of encountering it). Writers in both languages turned to forms of what I have called translingual nostalgia to do so.

In the process of explicating these translingual nostalgias, I have had occasion to call into question some of the most prevalent theoretical accounts of nostalgia, both generally and in specific reference to the postcolonial context. In particular, I have argued against the common assumption that nostalgia knows its object of desire concretely, an assumption that underpins Svetlana Boym's hugely influential distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgias, where the former acknowledge that their object is unattainable and the latter insist on the contrary. By developing my more context-sensitive and phenomenologically rich model of nostalgia, I have sought to contribute to nostalgia criticism in particular and memory studies more broadly a more productive framework for approaching literary nostalgia.

Throughout this dissertation, I have insisted on the political relevance of my analysis. Although I turn attention away from familiar connections between the novel and the nation and thus lose one of the easier points of political analysis in postcolonial literary studies, I gain a more fine-grained view of the way contexts of production and reception shift the political impact of nostalgia. As I showed in the case of A. K. Ramanujan, whose nostalgic "Prayers to Lord Murugan" could variously reclaim the body from Orientalist stereotypes, reinforce Dravidian nationalisms, or provide a translation aesthetics for poet peers in other parts of the subcontinent, nostalgia's lack of clear object keeps it open to varied, even opposing, uses. This fact is one that has so far been overlooked by scholars who have sought to describe the politics "of" nostalgia, rather than to explore the many ways in which nostalgia opens onto politics.

On the other hand, I have also shown how the assumption that nostalgia has a particular

politics, and a particular way of accessing that politics, has shaped the production of postcolonial poetry, most notably in the case of A. K. Ramanujan's original work, with its nostalgic shame. By drawing attention to that impact of nostalgia discourse, we can begin to see some of the unwitting consequences of our critical discourse as a force for repeating the colonial relationship of domination that leaves the postcolonial subject ashamed of the desire produced by that relationship.

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