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Issue 3



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Across Cultures
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Foreword

Gitanjali and Beyond: Across Cultures (Issue 3, Summer 2019)

Born in 1861, Rabindranath Tagore's life spanned the Romantic and Modern periods. He saw the devastation of World War 1, responded with alarm to the growth of nationalism, militarisation and aggressive expansionism in the inter-War years and was pained to witness the outbreak of World War II. He remained, till his death in 1941, the subject of a subject nation and did not live to see India become a sovereign nation in 1947. He was thus spared from witnessing the deluge of human displacement as a result of the Indian Partition. Yet he never lost faith in humanity. As a Romantic, he believed in the 'moral faculty of sympathy'¹ ('The Nation', p. 3) in humankind, and as a Modern he affirmed, 'The revelation of spirit in man is modern. I am on its side, for I am modern.'²

As a Renaissance man, Rabindranath was responsible for the final flourish that marked the Bengal Renaissance, as he brought about reforms in education and culture in what was a nation building enterprise. He effected this through the modernisation of the Bengali language to become the apt vehicle for a nation's expression, the themes of modernity and emancipation that he introduced in his literature, interdisciplinary learning and liberal, secular and inclusive teaching at his educational institutions in his schools (Ananda Pathsala and Patha Bhavana) and his international university (Visva-Bharati) in Shantiniketan and moved away from orthodoxy and patriarchy in the socio-cultural sphere. Rooted in the local, Rabindranath worked for social uplift by establishing cooperatives in his family estates and investing in a rural reconstruction centre at Sriniketan (Shantiniketan's sister institution) to inculcate self-dependency through agricultural and educational schemes in order to revive a sense of dignity in the surrounding depressed villages in Birbhum district in south Bengal. Yet Rabindranath, like his Scottish friend, Patrick Geddes, the town planner, conservation architect, educationist and environmentalist, believed that one should 'Think global, act local', as his interest in humanity extended beyond Bengal, beyond India's borders, to embrace the world. It was also, perhaps, his restlessness as a Romantic that he felt the need to travel, to leave his 'abode of peace' (Shantiniketan) from time to time, to travel to other lands and meet and communicate with like-minded individuals.

Rabindranath had been in England in 1878-1879 and again in 1890, travelling to Italy and France as well. But it was not till 1912, when he was 51, that Rabindranath felt he needed to travel to the West and meet writers and artists of his time. He came to London to meet his artist friend, William Rothenstein with prose translations of 103 poems in English, which he had done while convalescing on his estate in Shelidah on the Padma and on the boat to England. Rothenstein had expressed a desire to read his work, so on his request, Rabindranath handed him his notebook with some 'diffidence'. Rothenstein was part of the Bloomsbury Group and introduced Rabindranath and his poetry to litterateurs like W.B. Yeats, Thomas Sturge Moore, Ernest Rhys, George Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy and H.G. Wells. Rabindranath's poetry read by Yeats to a gathering on 12 July 1912, at Rothenstein's Hampstead home, deeply moved his captivated audience. An edition of Gitanjali was published by Macmillan in 1913. Rabindranath was elected to the India Society which nominated him for the Nobel Prize, the signatory being Sturge Moore. The conferring of the Nobel Prize for Literature in November based on his Bengali writing and English translations and his work in education and culture in Bengal, was the turning point in Rabindranath's internationalism. The

1. Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Nation', *The Modern Review*, 22/1 (1917), pp. 1-4, p. 3.

2. Das, Sisir Kumar. Ed. *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996, Vol. 2, pp. 663-668, p. 667.

Nobel Prize was pivotal in bringing the global recognition of Rabindranath as a world poet. Thrust onto the global stage, Rabindranath took on a self-appointed cultural role to reach across political borders to subvert the binarism of the coloniser and colonised, the dominant and the subjected, the West and the East. Rabindranath, who had so far written all his creative work in Bengali, turned to English in a conscious decision to write essays, lectures and letters in English and have his work translated, to address a world audience.

Henceforth, he was the restless globetrotter and at a time when journeys were long and slow, made by sea, an intrepid (often ill and tired) Rabindranath travelled to several countries in the East and the West, always on invitation, meeting intellectuals, artists and political leaders, speaking to packed audiences, participating in an international dialogue in an effort to bring the East and West closer together through mutual understanding and respect. He believed that the East had something significant to offer in her Eastern wisdom and tradition to the West and that India would take her rightful place again amongst the nations of the world in spite of her current subjectivity. So Rabindranath acted with agency, reaching out across cultures through transnational journeys and his writing, to bring the world closer together. He sought the civilized individual, cultivating what Michael Collins has termed a ‘liberal politics of friendship’, building a network of shared ideas with ‘friends and interlocutors’ who embodied the ‘pluralisation of civilized individuals’³ (Collins, 2012, p. 18) and shared his ideology.

In his biographical notes Sabyasachi Bhattacharya⁴ lists the countries to which Rabindranath travelled, sometimes making many journeys to some of them, e.g. to England, USA, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and China. He visited the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Canada, Burma, Argentina, Norway, Greece, Egypt, Singapore, Indo-China (Bali, Java), Thailand, Ceylon, Vietnam, Russia and Persia (now Iran and Iraq). Martin Kampchen and Imre Bangha⁵ list many more nations beyond this list where Rabindranath’s influence was felt through translations of his work and literary debates, such as in Korea, Tibet, the Arab countries, Turkey, Israel, Mozambique, Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Latvia, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Belgium, Latin America, Brazil, Costa Rica and Mexico. Rabindranath and his circle of friends and interlocutors may be viewed as transnational citizens who are cultural icons engaged in global dialogues as they impact on the world through their writing and work to create harmony and peace. This issue of *Gitanjali and Beyond* is in recognition of Rabindranath and his circle’s efforts to move across nation-state boundaries and communicate with the world, speaking to the world’s multiple and rich cultures.

Central to this issue are interviews of three writers, Ruskin Bond, Mark Tully and Patrick French, who have moved across nation-state boundaries like Rabindranath, to embrace, observe, understand and describe another culture to a wide audience. They are transnational citizens, who have crossed borders with ease and while Rabindranath was the man from the East who tried to explain what the East could offer to the West, the writers interviewed here originate in the West and have travelled East. But they have moved a step further than Rabindranath. They have chosen to live in the East and write about the East, and their audience is global, thus taking Rabindranath’s mission of explaining what India stands for by writing from within the country and thus contributing to a global understanding that is built on empathy and liberal humanism.

3. Michael Collins, *Empire, Nationalism and the Postcolonial World: Rabindranath Tagore’s writings on history, politics and society*, 2012, pp. 56-58)

4. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation* (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2011)

5. Martin Kampchen and Imre Bangha, *One Hundred Years of Global Reception* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2014),

The book reviews are of scholarly editions on aspects of Rabindranath's writing, presenting his multifaceted work. Imre Bangha's edited essays originate at Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest and as Mario Relich notes, the articles, 'in each case (are) also (a) warm appreciation of his (Tagore's) cultural, and to some extent also political, significance at a global level.' And as befits the ethos of this journal, the studies challenge boundaries of thought and ideas exemplified in the very title of Bangha's book, as Tagore is considered 'Beyond Language'.

Ranjan Ghosh's book, which is part of a trilogy of academic reappraisal of Tagore's work, is, as Anindya Raychaudhuri exemplifies, an 'analysis of Tagore's ideas' which are 'framed using a transcultural approach' in what Ghosh himself has 'described as part of his 'trans-(in)fusion project' which presents Rabindranath's pluralistic, non-hegemonic ideas implemented in his educational experiment at Shantiniketan.

The vast oeuvre of Rabindranath's creative output is the subject of Debarati Bandyopadhyay's edited volume on Rabindranath Tagore's Concourse. Here Bandyopadhyay has revived an old term, 'Assays' to describe an 'attempt' to do justice to Rabindranath's variegated output and as Usha Kishore has pointed out, these articles 'broaden the discourse on Tagore', adding substantially to existing scholarship.

Matthew Pritchard's essay discusses his own ongoing transcultural project as he works on bringing Rabindranath Tagore's "perfect union of word and note" in the original to a wider audience in what Pritchard calls 'a genre of singing translations' where the spirit and melody of Tagore's songs are captured and conveyed in singable translations in English. Pritchard shows how this method has been tried and tested on English audiences in the translation and performance of the German lieder and the French chanson traditions. His full translations of six Tagore songs are strong examples of how songs can cross linguistic barriers and retain their appeal.

Tom Pow's essay on 'Recalling Former Travels' is a paean to poets and their poetry whose words and the images they evoke move one's inner being and linger in other poets, and here in Pow's own creative expression. The poets recalled are from Peru to China and at the heart of this poetic journey are artists like Thomas Whatling and poets like Rabindranath, Burns and Neruda, whose lines are part of the national consciousness of their people who are sustained by the power and depth of their lines.

The poems in the final section move across cultures, speaking beyond the poet's socio-cultural experience at home, to embrace/recall/incorporate and/or speak to another culture in the spirit of Rabindranath's transnationalism. We have some powerful poetry in this special issue from Joyce Caplan, Elspeth Brown, Chrys Salt, Tapati Gupta, Alison Flett, Nandini Sen, Ana Maria Maguire, George Szirtes, Alan Riach, Donald Adamson, Stuart Paterson, Reza Haq, Patrick James Errington and Brian Johnston. In each of the creative pieces, we discover the cosmopolitan citizen, like Rabindranath, who is willing to understand, embrace and identify with common humanity that Rabindranath himself exemplified.

This special issue celebrates the transnational writer who challenges political borders and strives to remove borders of the mind.

Professor Bashabi Fraser
Editor-in-Chief
Gitanjali and Beyond

Section I: Interviews



Introduction to Interviews

Writing Writers Across Cultures Why India?

For some time now, I have been living between my two worlds, Britain and India, and to be more precise, between Scotland, my adopted nation and India, the land of my birth. Yet I have never encountered any obvious hostility in Scotland towards the migrant me or felt estranged from Indian society during my frequent visits there. But I have caught myself defending India to the British and Britain in India. It has almost become a default position as I cross nation-state boundaries and take the 'somewhere' with me when I go 'elsewhere'. I cannot relinquish one or the other. They live within me and have made me what I am today.

Like a moth I have been drawn to the illumination provided by migrant writers, writing about their diasporic experience, but I have never been singed by this flame; rather, I have felt my own light bulbs being ignited as I have understood and identified with their insider-outsider status, which gives writers the objectivity that makes writing engaging, sharpened by observation and enhanced by critical thinking. These writers have mostly been from former colonies as they have moved to Britain or America and continue to write from their new hostland. Like Rabindranath, they have come from the Saidian 'East', the literary and economic margins, who write back to the 'West' - the metropolitan centre as it were. But as I read more and met more people and started visiting literary festivals and heard transnational writers, it dawned on me that the trajectories of writers cannot be the simple East-to-West journeys, that the long historic association, however painful or unequal it might have once been, has created a romance of the East for many Westerners. And now with India's economic growth, her cyber cities, her immense publishing market and voracious readership, where English remains the lingua franca, it is a viable place for writers to pick up the romantic association and write from within India, subverting the centre-periphery binary, which is what Rabindranath sought through his own journeys, meetings, talks and writing – cultivating/continuing a dialogue between nations, no longer as travelogues, but as witness accounts as the outsider dons the insider's status and imbibes knowledge from within, not as an itinerant, but as a resident.

India has remained, for many British people, a place with which they have retained historic, economic and familial links. There is always someone in most British families, who has, over the past three centuries, been in India - born or married there, worked, lived, made a home, went to school and/or grew up in India. This reality confirms that the traffic of people in postcolonial times has not just been from the sub-continent to Britain, but also from Britain to India, an India which has become home to many transnational citizens. This truth was brought home to me with fresh vigour when Alan Riach and I edited the first anthology of Scottish and South Asian Poetry, *Thali Katori* (2017) where we found that Scots who went to India, wrote about India in their poetry, exploring their colonial positioning vis-à-vis India (they were known as the Company Poets), just as recent Indian migrants in Scotland write about their in-betweenness.

After my childhood days in London, I returned to India where I grew up reading Ruskin Bond, his debut novella, *A Room on the Roof* (1956) leaving a lasting impression of an aspiring and determined writer. Ruskin was part of the Indian landscape, writing its steaming plains and rolling hills, capturing its mists and monsoons and making India's children and women and men speak to me as they would on crowded buses, epic train journeys, on dusty roads, in the bazars and from the house

next door. His books poured out quickly enough for generations of readers to relish as they saw themselves and their Indian worlds mirrored in his stories, poems, memoirs, his nature and travel writing. He was like the Indian Dickens, who could be read like Household Words by the whole family, as his writing needed no censoring by watchful parents or teachers.

I first came across Mark Tully's writing when my husband, Neil, on one of his many visits to India, gave me *No Full Stops in India* (1991) to read, a book which we both enjoyed and have returned to time and again. Then I heard Mark Tully more than once at the Edinburgh International Book Festival where he has a huge loyal following. You have to be smart and book early to attend his author events. At these interviews, I could see that Tully, the BBC celebrity loved his India, just as Ruskin did. We bought all Tully's books and treasure them.

I was very fortunate to be invited by the University of Edinburgh to be the External Examiner of Patrick French's PhD thesis based on his publications. His excellent biography of V.S. Naipaul, *The World is What it is* (2008) added a new perspective on an apparently irascible great writer, while French's *India: A Portrait* (2012) was a revelation to me of the 'inheritance' of parliamentary careers and seats as an accepted 'norm' in India, making me understand that this practice is not just confined to the Nehru-Gandhi family. And once again, I found how deep an understanding of India emanates from an affection for a country in writers like Bond, Tully and French, who choose not just to travel to India, but live there and write about India from their vantage point as birds in their chosen nest. For a long time I believed that Ruskin Bond was an Anglo-Indian, so one of us. It was only very recently that I discovered he was a thoroughbred Englishman, but born and brought up in India, except for his brief interlude as a young adult in Jersey and London. Bond's story matches those of many in his time, whose parents too were born in India and whose grandfathers worked and grandmothers made their home there. Bond had the advantage (disadvantage?) of being thrown in the midst of the bustle of Indian small towns, hill stations and the sprawl of a New Delhi in the making.

Mark Tully had a privileged life as the son of a Burra Sahib in India and never played with or mixed with Indians, yet the smells and tastes remained with him and came back to take their hypnotic hold on him when he came back to India to take up his BBC position in Delhi. Patrick French is the only one who doesn't have any familial connection with India, except a historian's fascination for this vast sub-continent and he came very close to India when he was working on his book on *Younghusband* and then on *Tibet*. And when the right moment came, he took up residence in Delhi and now lives and writes from there.

What brought these British writers to make India their home and to write about India was a question that I needed to explore. Why India? And this is what prompted me on this mission to talk to these writers whose books I love, who have shaped my own writing. In the summer of 2018, I travelled to Mussoorie to meet the famous man of letters in his mistakenly named 'cottage' which is a massive three storeyed house perched on a hill, surrounded by his affectionate adopted family. We visited the bookshop where hundreds queue up every Saturday for a glimpse and signature of the resident writer, Ruskin Bond, whose books they clutch jealously and devour eagerly. I met Mark Tully in his spacious Delhi house and interviewed him while Gilly made sure we were served tea and then took their big, handsome, gentle dog out for a walk so that we could record 'in peace'.

I visited Patrick French in his aesthetically arranged Delhi flat, where he met us dressed in immaculate white and at ease in bare feet on a cool marble floor, while his cat wove in and out of our recordings. All these writers lived up to my dreams of them – endowed with a deep humanism that

makes them love India and live there, writing with a critical eye, a realistic perspective that can only come from writers who write about places and people with an affection that is genuine. These interviews will testify to the legitimacy Bond, Tully and French have earned through an intimate knowledge of a diversity that is India, which Rabindranath recognised as a unity inherent in her multifaceted reality, her resilience and dynamism.

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Interview with Ruskin Bond by Bashabi Fraser

BF: You were born in India in Kasauli of English parents. Could you describe some memories of your childhood? You then went to Bishop Cotton School in Shimla. What was your experience there? You started writing while you were in School and won several prizes. You were a shy boy, but did make some special friends as a child/a boy. Did your writing give you a certain confidence in yourself and in your abilities? Did you find your imaginative world a sustaining force for you?

RB: Well, we've got lots of questions there.....

BF: Yes....

RB: And so I'll begin at the beginning, like Alice, and, Kasauli - it is a small hill station near Simla and I was born there, but we didn't stay there very long. It was May, this month, and in those days in the hot weather, you know, the Saablog would send their Memsaabs up into the hills if they were going to have babies. So we were there a few months and my father at that time was working in a small state called Jamnagar. The ruler was known as the Jamsahib and in fact it was that particular state that brought cricket into India because it was the home state of the great Ranjitsinghji, who played for England, and his nephew, Dilip, who also played cricket for England; and so the English teams would have started coming to India, too. So I grew up in that environment until I was about seven. My father was a tutor, teacher. He started a small private school there and I learned to read actually upside down because, while all the girls and the children would be in a sort of class when I was very small. I would come and peer over their desks and see them reading out. So I'd get an upside down view of everything; and I could still read quite fluently upside down. I demonstrate it sometimes for children. They get very impressed although actually it's very easy.

So, anyway, then my parents separated when I was about eight, nine and my father died too when I was.... It was war-time, 1944, and he was then serving in the R.A.F. He was too old to be a fighter pilot. He was in what they called 'Codes and Ciphers'. And he'd already admitted me to the Bishop Cotton School. This was a good school. It was modelled on English public schools, so they had everything from ragging to flogging and, you know, all sorts of horrible customs, but also some good ones too. I think I owed quite a bit to it. They had a good library and from a very early age I was a bookworm, so in between compulsory games I did quite a lot of reading too. I finished my schooling there by the year 1950. And it was while I was at school I decided that writing was something I would like to do. I was good at essays and also because I read a lot, I think I was indirectly influenced by other writers, from the classics like Dickens. I read all of Dickens – then I read playwrights like J.M. Barrie and Shaw and A.A. Milne and then novels that were current then: Somerset Maugham and H.E. Bates. These were novelists of that period. So, by the time I finished school I'd read a lot and I was already writing little stories.

BF: You were very close to your father and in *Lone Fox Dancing*, your *Writer's Journal* and *Memoirs*, and scattered through your writing, there are descriptions of your time with your father and your father's last surviving letter to you. He was a very loving parent with a taste for art and culture and was fun to be with. If it is not too painful, could you describe certain incidents from the time you were with your father which remain memorable? How has your father influenced you as a writer?

RB: Yes, well, I don't recall my father being a great reader, but he certainly put books my way and he was an avid stamp collector. So I certainly learned a lot of geography helping him sort out his stamps. I've written a bit about him in *Lone Fox Dancing* and I even devoted a small book to him, a children's book called 'Looking for the Rainbow' which describes the two years that I spent with him in Delhi during the war, just the two of us together, and he would go off, of course, to the War Office during the day and I had to spend a lot of time on my own. But whenever he came back he would give all his time to me, so we would maybe go to bookshops or to the pictures; and he would take me around Delhi and tell me the stories behind monuments. You know, the Old Fort or the Kutb Minar or parts of Old Delhi. So we had a good relationship and I think that was a very formative period for me. I certainly missed him a good deal when he died. I got the news when I was in school. He'd put me the year before in Bishop Cotton, in Shimla.

And then, of course, I had to adjust to my mother's re-marriage and stepfather, in Dehradun, which took some time, which is why it was rather a lonely period when I was twelve or thirteen, but books were my friends. I mean, I would always beg, borrow or steal whatever I could find and read. Also, I used to go the films. I was quite a cinema buff in those years, in the 1940s. I can still rattle off the names of films and their casts, going back to that period. I walked a lot. I was a great one for trudging around and I would get to know a place that way so that even later on, when I lived in London, I would walk all over London. I came back to India, walked all over Delhi the few years I was there. Of course, in Mussoorie - you have to walk out of Mussoorie if you want a long walk. Now I don't walk very much but I used to, yes and in fact, in Dehradun my friends used to call me Road Inspector. They always found me plodding around here and there.

BF: Well, apart from your two years in the Channel Islands, with your aunt, and some time in London you have lived all your life in India.

RB: Yes....

BF: But you chose to come back to India, booking your passage home as soon as you got the advance from your first novel, *A Room on the Roof*.

RB: That's right...

BF: You went to England to find a better life there. Did India stay with you while you were away? Did your formative years in India seep into your consciousness, prompting you to come back to India? What drew you back to the country of your birth?

RB: Yes, I think that I took India with me, without realising it, in those two years I spent in Jersey. Jersey in those days was very insular. You didn't see people except holidaymakers from England in the summer. So I wanted to get out very much and escape to London as soon as I could. And I'd been writing my first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, while I was in Jersey and I completed it in London; after doing two or three drafts because I did find a publisher in a firm called André Deutsch and the editor there was a lady called Diana Atfield who, some years later, became quite well known herself as a writer. But at that time she was just an editor, just about ten years older than me. I believe she's still around at the age of a hundred. And so she sort of took me in hand and made me write and re-write and revise my novel. So I worked, I think, harder on that first book than I have on anything else since then. And they finally took it and gave me this £50 advance. That was the standard advance back in the 1950s. Fifty pounds was enough to get back to India. We travelled by

sea in those days. I think forty pounds was the fare and I still had ten or fifteen pounds in my pocket when I arrived in Bombay. Oddly enough the book was only published after my return, so I didn't wait even for the book to come out. It was only, I think, almost a year after I got back and I was freelancing from Dehradun, that *The Room on the Roof* had got published in England, and there was a German edition too and one in America, and then another edition. A year later they wrote to me and said I'd been awarded the John Llewellyn Rees Award which was an award given to a Commonwealth writer who under thirty, who had, in their opinion had a promising future as a writer.

In fact, the year after I got it, it was given to V.S. Naipaul. I never met V. S. Naipaul but I did meet his younger brother briefly, Shiv Naipaul, who had also written two or three books. But he died young. He was very talented but his career was cut short.

So, when I got back to India, I came back more for emotional reasons or, as I said, you know, just drawn back to the country, to the atmosphere, to the place I'd grown up in and... because although I'd been reasonably happy in London, in the early 50s, it was a lonely city to live in unless you already knew people there or had friends, you know. You were in a small bed-sitting room with the landlady who is rather strict usually as to who you saw or didn't see. I would catch the early morning Tube to go the office in Tottenham Court Road and back again. And maybe on a Saturday or Sunday you got some time off. And there, too, I would go to the theatre a lot, or to the pictures. Whenever I felt homesick for India I would go off to Kew - Kew Gardens and go into the big hothouses they have there and you know, they are nice and steamy, and I would feel I was home again. So, anyway, I did come home.

And then I started freelancing from Dehradun in a period when you didn't have many publishers in India. But there were lots of magazines and newspapers and I wrote a lot for magazines. That's why I wrote so many short stories in that period. Over the years I've written hundreds of short stories. And then, later on, when we did have people publishing more over here, in the way of books, and fiction too, I had all this backlog of work which could go into collections published by Penguin or Rupa or other publishers who came up in that period. So that was Dehradun. 1953 I was in London. In '55 I came back. I moved to Delhi in 1959. Did odd jobs there too but I was always writing, until I ran away from Delhi you could say. In the 1960s I came up to Mussoorie, up here... and I've been up here ever since. Forgot to go away.

BF: Forgot to go away? When did you know you wanted to be a writer?

RB: Oh, when I was at school.

BF: You have always kept diaries/notebooks which are great resources for your writing. Would you say that most of your work is taken from personal experiences, that people you meet, your friends, family and acquaintances become characters in your writing?

RB: A lot of it is. Yes. A lot of my writing is taken from my own life and from personal experiences: friends, family, but I change them around a lot. So if I've had, say, an uncle who was slightly eccentric, he might become even more eccentric in my stories, you know, and do strange things. Like my Uncle Ken, poor chap, and if children like a particular character then I will have to invent some stories about that person. But very often I think with most characters with most writers, I'm sorry, if you go back and dig into their work, you'll find most of their characters are based on real people or people they've known, you know. Like Dickens' Mr. Micawber, or so many others - even

with Thackeray, you know, old Colonels from India and people who turn up in his books. I think most writers draw on that even if we fictionalise it to a great extent. But writing for children, I have sometimes, well, left myself behind and written about other children's stories, like *The Blue Umbrella* up in the Hills in a village here or *Angry River* or *The Girl in a Flooded River*. So things like that. But now that I'm in my eighties I find that, well, people ask me to write memoirs because I guess there are not many people around now who maybe remember what happened, you know, in the 40s, just before Independence, or that period. People want to know about it and say, "Oh yes, Ruskin, you were alive when India became independent." And I say, "Yes, very much so." So although as a boy I was hardly aware of the political situation maybe, but other things were impressed upon you. So the older you get, in a way, the more you have to look back upon and... in a way, you don't run out of material.

And poor me, when I wrote *The Room on the Roof* when I was seventeen or eighteen, and after that I said, "Now what do I write?" Because I'd written myself out, in a way. So it took some time to accumulate... experience, and you know, and more people to write about.

BF: Rusty was the chief protagonist of your semi-autobiographical first novel. Then Rusty crops up in other stories, e.g., in *Vagrants in the Valley*. Your friends, Somi, Bhim, Haripal, Ranbir, Chhotu, Krishnan, Praveen, are the inspiration for some of your characters. Could you describe some of your favourite characters, ones for which you hold a special affection?

RB: And Rusty, you see, it's like an alter ego. There are a lot of stories. In *The Room on the Roof* I called myself Rusty. And then I wrote a lot of short stories which were just in the first person and I didn't call myself Rusty in them; but then there was a particular editor at Penguin Books here who said, "Why don't we make a series of your first person stories and put yourself as Rusty in all of them?" So they would slip in the name Rusty?? Ruskin???, which was all right because I was writing about myself, so it was perfectly okay. So a lot of these first person stories became sort of Rusty stories, changed from the third person to the first person. In fact, I did that even when I wrote *The Room on the Roof*. I think I first wrote it in the first person and then changed it to the third person because then I could bring in a few more characters too, you know, otherwise you're seeing everything through your own eyes.

No, I enjoy writing in the first person. I'm a very subjective sort of writer and because really, I think what I enjoy most of all is writing a sort of the personal essay, you know, on just anything under the sun. It could be, you know, a ladybird sitting on my desk or a bird at the window or the monkey taking off with my pyjamas. I just build up a sort of personal reflection on these things and try to make them humorous. I try to see the funny side of life which I think I sort of see better now than I used to. When we're young we take life very seriously, don't we? Now I think, sometimes at least we ought to be able to see the funny side of it.

BF: Could you describe some of your favourite characters? Ones you hold in special affection?

RB: Well a lot of them. I've enjoyed a lot of them. You see, when I run out of my characters sometimes, I fall back on relatives or invent relatives. I invent a grandfather who likes animals; although my grandfather died when I was a baby, so I don't remember him at all. But my mother used to tell me that my grandfather kept these pets, unusual ones, so I use that for all sorts of stories. Then people think I had a very kind and gentle grandmother who was always baking cakes for me. She did in some of my stories, but I think she was a very stern old lady who would say - a typical

Victorian who would say, you know, “Little boys should only speak when spoken to” and “No second helpings unless you’ve been a good boy today”, you know, and sort of rationed me out to two slices of bread and things like that. But then there was a neighbour in Dehradun who attended to my grandmother. She was a crippled old lady, but she was very fond of me. So I would go over to her and she had a larder full of all sorts of cakes and pastries and wonderful things, which I could dip into whenever I wanted. So she came into one or two of my stories too.

So then friends, too. Uncle Ken was a popular one and a teacher at school, Mr. Oliver, who was a bit eccentric. Maybe that was Dickens’ influence, to have the odd eccentric character. But then I wrote also about animals, I often wrote about animals – and when I ran out of uncles and aunts to write– I could always fall back on a ghost. So, I could always cook up a ghost story. So I must have written a good thirty to forty ghost stories. Kids complain nowadays. They tell me, “Look, Mr. Bond, we like your ghost stories, but they’re not scary enough. Can’t you make them more frightening?” Because nowadays everything is so - if I watch film on TV, I get scared because, you know, you get so much, so many horror films. Well, not just films, but the world itself, and what’s going on sometimes is scary and dismays you. So I can understand, it takes a lot to scare children nowadays. So maybe it’s best to just try and make them laugh.

But really, till the age of about forty I was basically writing for adults, or thought I was writing for adults, but I really wrote stories, specifically children’s, only in the late 60s and in the 70s, and a few were published in England too. The Blue Umbrella and Angry River among others. Then they got reprinted here and they’re still in print. In fact, everything remains in print, particularly in India. Not abroad, but here. I enjoyed writing for younger people. In a way it’s more of a discipline because you have to catch their interest right on the page, the first page. They’re not going to tolerate you for more than a page you know; an adult might give you two or three chapters before, you know, tossing your book away. But with kids, you’ve got to catch their attention straight away and tell them a story... and a good story; and have appealing characters, you know.

BF: You have always sought and cherished a room of your own – your dragon’s den as it were - as is evident in Notes from a Small Room. Could you describe some of your rooms and the works you wrote in them? A room with a view is something you have always valued. Could you describe some memorable views which have found their way into your writing?

RB: Well yes, even when I was a boy I was very determined always to have a little room or space of my own, and when I came to live with my mother and step-father when I was nine, ten and I managed to get a room. It was small, and it had a window. I think it’s not only a must that you have a room of your own, you must have a window too, to look out upon the world and let the world look in on you now. This is my present window, it looks out over the mountains and over the valley and, if I look down my nose, I see the rubbish dump too, but you can’t escape rubbish dumps any more. Before I came to live here in Ivy Cottage, I lived in another little house called Maplewood Lodge, down in the forest, lower down the hill, and there the windows actually opened out on to the trees in a way, quite close. I got a lot of visitors in the form of birds and squirrels and bats and, you know, praying mantises, and I became very close to nature in a way and that’s why a lot of the natural world started coming into my stories and essays a good deal, after I moved to Mussoorie. So I’ve sometimes wondered, when I’ve been occasionally in Delhi or cities and find people are living in rooms which don’t have windows, you know, it must be very depressing at times. So, one is lucky to be up in the hills, and even if places are changing and getting built up as hill stations are now, you can still get out, you know.

So here we are of course, I've been at this particular dwelling since 1980. And everything I've written since then – stories or novellas or memoirs or poems – have been written in that particular room where you just took a picture. So, I suppose a room is important. I think for a writer it makes things very different and I suppose some different writers would want different kinds of space. Some would like to write while they're on the move or sit out in a garden or at a desk. But I just need enough space for the pad and pen and a window close by.

BF: In India you've lived in Kolkata, Dehradun, Shimla, Mussoorie and Delhi. You have a great ability to describe places and take your reader into the streets, houses, shops and restaurants and even cinemas with you in your stories. I know that each of these towns and cities have held different experiences for you, depending on when you were there, with whom and where and under what circumstances; for example, Delhi with your father was very different from the Delhi with your mother and step-father, especially as you were in Connaught Place when you were a boy and in Rajouri Garden when you were a reluctant Delhi-wallah. Could you describe what some of these places have meant for you? Could you share memorable times you have had in these places, which have gone into your writing?

RB: Dehradun always has a special place in my affection. I think because off and on during my childhood I would occasionally live there with my grandmother. In my school years I would come home there during the winters. And it was a small town then, right up to the fifties. It was a town with a population of about forty, fifty thousand and to-day it's nearer ten lakhs which is a hundred thousand. So you can see it is no longer a small town or a garden town as it used to be. And the surroundings were nice, so I'd go out with my friends on our bicycles and, you know, have picnics and adventures... even come up into the foothills, hiking... so there're a lot I can look back on which has given me a special place of affection, in Dehradun. And Delhi was interesting during my father's time because it was then just New Delhi, the capital, and Old Delhi, Shahjahanbad then. And Delhi too was just two or three million then. (LAUGHS) I don't know what it is now but it's spread and spread and spread and... you mentioned Rajouri Garden... So, after freelancing in Dehradun for a couple of years when I was about twenty-three, twenty-four, I went to Delhi and stayed with my mother in Rajouri Garden which was then a far-out refugee colony. After the Partition of India into Pakistan and India, a lot of the refugees from what became Pakistan, had migrated to India. So these colonies sprang up. So it was a colony that come up right in the wilderness, and since then, Delhi never stopped spreading in all directions, even into other States like Haryana and UP. It just keeps on growing, so it has changed considerably... and yet, I would say that perhaps Delhi is a little more interesting than it used to be in the sixties. At that time it was very dull. You just had the bureaucrats or the refugees and nothing else; but now it has become a little more mixed, more cosmopolitan, and you have your book fairs and art galleries and you have events... things are happening which didn't happen before. And all the publishers are in Delhi too, now; they've all come from Calcutta and Bombay to Delhi because I feel they have to be in the capital, in a way. So every now and then I do go down to Delhi to see publishers, sometimes to remind them that royalties are due. Usually most of my publishers are very good to me. I've published across the board, with so many publishers, you know, not just one or two. You see, in England or in America probably you get signed up with a particular publisher and you stay with that publisher for many years; but you couldn't do that in India back in the fifties or sixties because you wouldn't have made a living. So you had to write for as many people as you could. And now things are certainly better for writers in India and for publishers, too, in spite of all the rival technological attractions. Books are being published in a big way and writers are making money. Let's say, thirty, forty years ago, a writer had to publish abroad if he wanted decent sales, but he can now make a good amount here from being published.

BF: You seem to be very close to your natural surroundings and have a deep affection for them. In fact, you have a very poetic style, which is beautiful and moving. You know the trees, plants, flowers, birds, the living creatures, by name, with intimacy. In fact, nature seems to offer protagonists for your stories. How did you get your natural world so well and identify the names of flora and fauna around you? Could you say how the natural world has influenced you as a writer? Would you say that the landscape and life in it has often been imbued with magic for you? Taking on a life of their own in your children's stories and accounting for the magic rivers which readers find so endearing.

RB: Yes, I think it was that move to Mussoorie in the 1960s and living out on the outskirts, in a forest area, which did bring me closer to nature and helped me to appreciate it more and to observe it closely but I...

BF: Yes. Do you mind saying that again? About the innocence, the romance, the children's writing, the success?

RB: Yes, and my children's writing. It's in my early work. I won't say it was deliberately written for adults. It's just I was writing, in a way, for myself or for anybody who would read it. So, the fact that *The Room on the Roof* has been published as a book for adults; it has been published for what they call 'Young Adults' and it's been published as a children's book. So it has sort of crossed these boundaries and some of the early stories, too, were published in children's magazines. A lot of them were published in adult magazines. It's only, as I mentioned, you know, in middle age, that I started occasionally writing stories specifically for children, you know, and sort of... maybe making them simpler, not easier, but just telling a story where the main characters would be children. The protagonists would be children. And, obviously, when you're writing for youngsters there are certain things you don't write about, but then I've never, perhaps, been a controversial kind of writer, and maybe because I had a lonely childhood I can identify with children who are lonely or are looking for something. Also, the response from children is sometimes quite refreshing. They're honest critics... so, like I mentioned the girl who thought my ghost stories weren't frightening enough... they tell me so. Or somebody else would say, "Can't we have more action in your stories? You know, they're a bit slow moving." You know, they're really honest. So, I would get sometimes quite honest criticism. Whereas sometimes adults won't be that honest or they will either praise you and criticise you only if they dislike you. So I think it's also nice to feel that those children are going to grow up and maybe tell their children to read your story. As they do. I'm into at least three generations now of readers, which is a good thing. And I think now, for the coming years or whatever is left to me, I will write more for young readers. For one thing, I'm lazy and you don't have to write a very long story, you don't have to write a 500-page book for reader, although of course, those Harry Potter books are pretty long and they are very popular.

BF: They stopped at seven.

RB: Now she writes detective stories.

BF: Yes.

RB: I read one the other day, it was okay. It was a bit long-winded. I mean, I'm still an Agatha Christie fan.

BF: So am I. So's my dad.

RB: I mean, you read from beginning to end. There's nothing, no padding or any extrapolations and edits. I mean, she has a good psychological insight into characters. But what I'm sad about (well, this is not part of the interview but) so many good writers of detective fiction from that period – you know, the thirties, forties, fifties – are not read now, apart from Agatha Christie. She seems to be the only one who has survived. You won't find Dorothy Sayers or Margery Allingham or Ngaio Marsh being re-printed and being read now. Now it's all the more the American type of story - you know, kick him in the stomach and bash him over the head. It's a sort of... more violent forms of crime fiction now that are popular. The fiction as a puzzle or as a, you know, as something to be deducted - a deduction, has died out, you know. Somehow Agatha Christie has survived.

BF: Children love your books. In India you are the most loved children's writer in English. The ink from your pen continues to flow and, living now in a small place like Mussoorie, your characters continue to speak to you. Your plots take shape, your ideas flow like an endless stream. What keeps your imagination burning like a constant flame in your Indian corner? What is the secret of your captivating storytelling power?

RB: I'm not sure, really. I ask myself that question sometimes, because I find ... in recent months, or in the last year or two, I've been writing more than I usually do and getting more ideas, you know for stories and when I put pen to paper I find it runs along. Maybe it's just old age and I'm just sort of rambling. But I thought one was supposed to dry up as you get older but the opposite is happening. Maybe it's because my other activities have been curtailed. I don't know what it is. I don't go out as much as I used to. You know I am limited in how far I can walk, and if I travel it will be some book fair or litfest and I take Rakesh or Bina with me, so I don't get lost. So maybe the other reason is - I don't go to parties or to entertainments. So, it's maybe because I spend more time at home and in my room and amongst my books. I just sit down and write and it's a part of me. Last year Lone Fox Dancing came out and since then another memoir -more or less a reflective one, not in chronological order; and that will be published by Penguin in August/September, and I've got another two. I've done a nature book on flowers - not a botanical book, you know, just what I enjoy about flowers and you know, things like that; and I write the odd poem.

BF: I love your poems. You use rhyme.

RB: I try not to overdo the rhyme, but...

BF: It fits. it fits the poem.

RB: So I must write more poetry too.

BF: Yes, please do.

RB: So, then there's always something to write.... another children's book and then one about my school days too. I was thinking I'll do that... in fact, I've started it. Just that particular year I've taken - the year of Independence, and what happened that year - while I was at school and in the country at large and sort of seen through the eyes of a thirteen-year old. So I think, then again, I'm lucky. After all, with reasonable health, you know. Obviously if you don't keep well, or have symptoms, you know, it's not easy to work. Living in a place too, where I'm generally at ease, although it gets cold in winter now. I suppose Scotland is colder.

BF: Scotland is very cold.

RB: I suppose it must be.

BF: Always cold.

RB: Always cold. My father used to tell me about that. He - as a young man he also went to England briefly, for a couple of years, and spent some time there. He had pictures of Loch Lomond and used to collect Harry Lauder records.

BF: In your life you've taken several risks. You have had, as you say, many beginnings. In spite of your innate shyness you have shown determination and purpose and a certain freedom from fear of the unknown. What gave you this strength of mind to pack up and leave your home... leave a town, a job or a country whenever you felt the urge to try your luck elsewhere? Would you say that you have the eternal adventurer's blood in you?

RB: I'm not a particularly brave or adventurous person. I think if danger confronts me I'll turn and run. I've strong legs. I can run fast, or I used to! But I was adventurous in the sense of wanting to do my own thing and not be tied down to the sort of domestic life I was born with, or the home life my brothers and sister grew up in. I wanted to be independent, actually I felt a writer had to be independent. So, for that I took risks. When not having any income or independent means, it was necessary to take up a job, I took it... but when it became possible to throw it up too, I would throw it up. So I did in Jersey, I went through two or three jobs and in London just the one; and back in India I worked in Delhi for a couple of years, and then did different things, but always with the intention that it was just temporary, and well, since I came to Mussoorie it's been full-time work, and before that too. Maybe the idea of being of a freelance always appealed to me. Of course, when you're young you can take risks, and now things are you know, fairly settled. I can be sure that royalties will flow in. with so many books in print and people - somebody's buying them somewhere. So that helps me and helps me also help the kids through school and college and help my adopted family. I have been well looked after. I would say I'm a writer without regrets. If I look back on my life, well, I would like to have been a better writer, but I've been able to do what I wanted to do and maybe, write the things I wanted to write and lived the kind of life I wanted to live and had books around me. There are still books I want to read; they are under my bed too, I have no space, no space for any more and a lot of my own pile up because publishers, they send them, every time they reprint, they will send copies... and so they pile up. I give them away whenever I can.

BF: As you said in your essay, 'On Being an Indian', of your recent Indian identity, "...race did not make me an Indian; religion didn't make me an Indian; but history did and in the long run it's history that counts." Yet the India you live in has changed beyond the India you knew during pre-Independence and the first two decades after Independence. Do you recognise it as the country you chose to live in? Or do you feel it has changed beyond your expectations? Do you still find India fascinating?

RB: Yes, India is still fascinating, but you are right. There have been changes. That little piece on being an Indian I wrote, it must have been in the mid-eighties - 1980s, but I think most of what I said I would still say, but of course the world has changed. Countries have changed. There's more of a sort of nationalism in the air, more of conflict, not just here but in the world at large. But I've not had any problem in being accepted as Indian. In fact, maybe now I'm more accepted because I'm well known, whereas, say, twenty, forty years ago, I would never, I mean, I wasn't well known, so there I would have to maybe tell people, "I'm an Indian by birth and by choice," but now people sort of

accept that because they've read a lot and even if they haven't read me, they've heard of me or they know about me. It would be different, maybe, if I went to a village or some remote area, they still wouldn't know me. I remember twenty years back I went to a hotel near the airport. I was put up there and they took me for a foreigner and kept asking me, "Sir, and when did you arrive in India?" So I said, "The nineteenth of May, 1934 - by a stork."

BF: In India? Which airport was this?

RB: Delhi.

BF: You have managed to stay unaffected by the divisive politics of India and write in your refreshing style with your characteristic witty observations. How have you managed to do this without deviating from themes which remain distinctively Indian?

RB: Well, you know, I've made a conscious effort to stay out of politics because India is so political and it's so difficult to actually stay out of politics because things get politicised very quickly. But I think I've been wise in a way to stay out of taking sides, but that doesn't mean I don't take an interest in politics. I keep very much up to date you know. I know exactly what's happening. I follow the news on television. When I get a newspaper I read it and I know other people's views. So, I keep myself informed, but I don't get involved in the political give and take because it gets heated up at times; and then I'm basically a storyteller so I'm writing about the basics of India. You know, the lives of ordinary people, including myself, and I think that's for me. If I got into the political whirlpool, I don't think I would be as well accepted or as widely or generally accepted by people at large; because I think most people think of me as someone who is Indian, but not taking sides; you know, not getting into partisan affairs. But, anyway, it's good, after all it's better that the country should be political and that everybody shouts and makes a scene, rather than we have a totalitarian country. I mean, I ask myself sometimes, if I wasn't living in India, where would I like to live... in China? I don't think so. I wouldn't have the freedoms that I have here. Would I like to live in the Philippines? No. You get shot there. I'm not a drug addict, but you know, your friend might get shot and then you come down. And would I like to live in Burma? No. Would I like to live in Bangladesh? Who would publish me there? All right, skip India and go up. Would I want to live in a poppy field in Afghanistan? Or the Middle East? Or get to.... there is Syria, there is Libya, there is the Yemen. There are all these wonderful countries. Would I want to live there? So, you're not left with much of a choice. Would I want to live in America? I don't know how to use a gun! Even Henry Miller shot himself after all. So, I think I'm safe here. Reasonably safe, let us say, and tolerated. People put up with me.

BF: And loved....

RB: Yes, I feel there's love too, even though I'm a grumpy fellow at times. So people sort of take that also from me. So I think Europe would not offer enough contrasts, as I said. Here there's something of everything, I mean in Europe the languages are different, but the lifestyle is much the same, isn't it? Just different kinds of beer in France, Germany and Britain... and I think Scottish Scotch whisky is more appreciated in India now than it is perhaps in Scotland. By the way, would you like....I've got vodka... would you like a drink?

BF: I wouldn't, no. Thank you. I'm not a big drinker at all.

RB: I have a Sikh friend who used to be in Dehradun when I was in my twenties and he went off to England when he was in his late twenties. He's a few years younger than me... about five years younger than me. He owns the biggest wine store in the United Kingdom And he was just from a small backwater in Dehradun.

BF: What's his name?

RB: Narindar Singh Sami. Well, now his sons are running it. Yes... he gets wines too from all over the world you know, wines a hundred years old... very expensive wines....

BF: So is he in London?

RB: Yes, in London. I've got the address somewhere. On the outskirts of London somewhere.

BF: Shall we go on? There are quite a few people like you, who stayed on in India after 1947; and in your writing you mention several people...

RB: In a way, I didn't stay on... I came back. You know, I went away....

BF: That's a good point.

RB: And a lot of people got left behind, the poor Anglo-Indians and Europeans. There were so many, actually, but they've all gone now.

BF: There is Paul Scott's novel, *Staying On*.

RB: *Staying On*. Yes.

BF: And many of them have felt marooned in a changing India and felt they did not have a community anymore. However, you have not felt an outsider in India. You have a great compassion for the people you meet and know. In fact, your compassion is especially reserved for the marginalised in India and you seem to have a respect for the struggling millions of the grassroots. How would you account for this deep humanity and understanding?

RB: That's true. I guess I was never very close to my own community, even as a boy, if you would call it the Anglo-Indian community or those who were born in India and grew up here, apart from my father; and then things changed so quickly. You see, in my school in 1946 we'd have had a lot of English and Anglo-Indian boys and they all went away in '47; and then the Muslim boys, too. You see Partition came, one-third of the school were evacuated to Peshawar, Lahore and wherever their homes were. Evacuated overnight, under army convoy and then an influx in '48 of all the Sikhs and Punjabis who'd come in from Pakistan. So that even in school, things kept changing, so I was constantly milling around with children of different backgrounds. First, British or Anglo-Indian, then Indian, Muslim and Hindu and Sikh and... so... in a way that was something that made me used to these tremendous cultural differences that we still have. So I'm, well, I've sort of tried to go along with everybody... and look for what appeals to me, and not turn my back, but at least accept what doesn't appeal to me. And I think, by and large, at times you know, I wish things – some things were different, but, as I said, you can't have everything your own way. You've got to go along with the general life around you and while not being necessarily a part of the mainstream - since I always believe in my own individuality - but not fight against it either...

BF: Would you say that your immediate, intimate experience of India makes you a very different writer writing on India than those who write from afar? No Indian thinks of you as a westerner. In fact, you seem, as all Indians say, “One of us.” How do you feel about your position as a British born Indian?

RB: I sometimes ask myself if I hadn't come back to India, and had stayed on in England, would I have been the same kind of writer? Or would I even have continued as a writer. If that first book had flopped, I might have done something quite different and never written another. And then if I had stayed on, what would have I have written about? Because India was so embedded in me that I could only write about my Indian experience, about the India I knew. So I think perhaps as.... people have often said, “You made a mistake, Ruskin, you shouldn't have come back. You'd have been a more successful writer if you'd lived in England, continued to live in the U.K.” And I feel I might not have been a writer at all or I might have, you know, just dropped out of the race. Because at least I have something unique to write about. That is the India I've known and that I've seen change and the Indians I have known. And the life I have led here is different from what most writers have known and, as you say, the British Indian experience is also there in my past and I'm very conscious of it. And I'm also totally indebted to the English language, because I grew up with English books and English schooling. I see it also as a language that is now very much a part of this country's present and future, and the very fact that the language has grown and become more in demand, I mean, it may not be the King's English but it is wanted. It is used...

BF: And read.

RB: And read, yes, so that in itself, I think, justifies my having chosen to be a writer here, to be writing in English in India, as an Indian with a British parentage or a father's and grandfather's, which goes back to... my grandfather was a Londoner... came out as a seventeen-year old, joined up, went to the Bow Street police station in London, joined up.... sort of left home, in a way; joined what was called The Scottish Rifles. He came out for seven years with the Colours and five in the Reserve, or something like that, and then my father and all his brothers were born in India. And on my mother's side, it goes back even further, but I can't really trace it too far back except that her father was born in a place called Dari- a place in the North-West frontier, when Mr. Durand had his office there. It was the Durand Line, the border between India and Afghanistan, Dera Ismail Khan and he worked in the office, Durand's office, you know. He was just a clerk, so maybe he made some mistakes in drawing that line which still causing trouble nowadays.

BF: Would you like to tell us how you came to have this family?

RB: Yes, otherwise I'd be a grumpy old man, living alone. I wouldn't have survived for so long, I think....

BF: The role they are playing in your ...

RB: - in my life? Yes...

BF: Yes. Especially you mention Goutam quite a lot, who seems to be quite wise.

RB: Oh, Goutam - he's wicked, he's around somewhere. He's also studying in Bhubaneswar, but they're on holiday. He's gone out for the evening, I think, with his friends. Well, he does unusual things now and then, that's why I put him in a story. So they're ... Rakesh, his father, Prem

and his wife worked for me and lived with me back in 1970, in the old house, called Maplewood, and then the family grew up around them. They were all, practically all born in the house. They're his children and now they've grown up and they have children. So, Prem has three, and Rakesh has married and has three kids.

BF: Rakesh and Bina.

RB: And they have Siddharth, Goutam and Srishthi. And then Mukesh is Rakesh's younger brother. He lives further down the hill, with his father. Prem has a small shop there. So, Mukesh is married to Bina's sister. That keeps the in-laws to a minimum; and they have two kids. And Dali, Rakesh's sister, married a boy in the Punjab and she comes and goes. She's also got kids.

BF: What is Prem's wife's name?

RB: Her name is Chandra.

BF: You have written multiple genres: short stories, novels, essays, memoirs and sketches. The list is long and you have over a hundred and twenty books.

BF: Actually, over a hundred and eighty -

RB: Yes. Actually I haven't counted. Some booksellers give me different figures too. But in print there aren't that many titles. But we have to remember that some are children's books, so they're very short, you know. Like these Penguin books. Some are collections of stories. But still, it is quite a lot. But then, since I've been writing for... since....

BF: Since you were at school, really?

RB: Yes, since the mid-fifties, and getting published, not in my school years. *The Room on the Roof* was published in 1956.

BF: Yes, but also in school.

RB: Yes, I was writing...

BF: - in the School Magazine?

RB: Oh yes, the School Magazine. But I also wrote a novel and it was called *Nine Months*. Now that was the length of the school year. It was nothing to do with a pregnancy. Anyway, it was a record of school, things that were going on, but I put my teachers in it and said funny things about them..

BF: You got into trouble.

RB: I got into trouble and it was written in exercise books. My housemaster called me to his office and he tore it up. That was the end of my first book. It was no great loss to literature. Of course, we used to get caned in those days. So my first introduction to literature, in a way, was the wisest decision - stuff books down your pants, you know, so when you got flogged, it wouldn't hurt. So I and my friends, two of three of us - we all did that. We all stuffed our exercise books or text books

down. Of course our housemaster was wise to it, so after one whack he said, “Bond, take it out of your...” So, out came *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare. He said, “Well, you’re not going to like this one!” Bang! Another one! We used to get caned in those days. It was all part of the process, because we would call our school ‘the Eton of the East’ so we had to be caned. But nobody minded, really. You became a hero, a school hero, the more often you got punished or flogged.

BF: Finally, would you be happy to share with your readers what you’re working on now?

RB: Well, I’ve just finished another little memoir, which is more a sort of a reflection or cogitation on the writing life and living here too, and the natural world – and how that’s influenced me. Then I want to do another little children’s book called *Goalkeeper* about a boy who wants to be a football goalkeeper.

BF: You were a goalkeeper.

RB: I was a goalkeeper but I won’t be here. I’ll make it another boy. My goalkeeping days are over. A few months back I was on the road and a football came bouncing along. Some kids had been kicking a ball around, so I was tempted. So I gave the ball a mighty kick. The ball flew away, but I was hobbling around in agony for two days. I thought I had gout in my left foot.

BF: Oh dear.

RB: So I think the nice thing about writing is that you can still write at any age, provided you think you’ve still got your mind functioning, whereas in football, I think you retire at forty, twenty-five, forty.

BF: I think I have one final question. Your books continue to have an innocence, a romance and magic about them. And I just think of the magic of *The Magic Mountain* and *The Magic Forest*, they are magical. Would you like to comment on the innocence, romance and in spite of the conflicts in today’s world?

RB: I think it partly comes from what I grew up on... in the way of books, because of what appealed to me as a boy, as a young reader. Well the first book I read was *Alice in Wonderland*. The second must have been *Peter Pan*, and though I went on to realistic adventure novels too later on, the magical aspect of life, nature, always appealed; and as I said, the plays of J M Barrie are totally out of fashion now,

BF: He’s a Scottish writer.

RB: *Peter Pan* was the best known. I read all the others, the *Mary Rose*, *A Kiss for Cinderella* and *Quality Street*. They were sentimental but, they always had an element of magic in them. Innocence - yes, well and romance. I suppose I got them from films, I don’t know. They were just maybe something embedded in my nature. I guess we’re also born with a particular kind of nature and it influences our lives and our writing. Even now sometimes people tell me, “you are such an innocent person.” But I’m not! I’m cunning.

BF: Is there anything that you would like to tell us before we stop? Anything that you would like to share? What advice would you give writers to-day?

RB: To young writers?

BF: Young writers but even to writers like us.

RB: You see there so many. It's become quite fashionable in India for youngsters, or even oldsters, to want to have books published. For some it's an ego trip, for others it's maybe a genuine desire to write. With the result that vanity publishers are doing really well. Because they take your money and give you 500 copies if you are lucky. And kids ...why, only yesterday some kid left me a book here. She's twelve years old. She'd written it like a novel, published it. Her parents must have spent one or two lakh rupees to just publish it. So they show off, "My daughter, who's written a book." That's fine if you want to write and write and write. But when I did read it, just a page or two, it was full of grammatical mistakes. You know, bad English. So I obviously, the first thing is, if you want to write, respect the language you're writing. Whether it's English or Hindi or Swaheli or whatever. Don't insult the language by, you know, with bad grammar and spelling. At least follow the rules to some extent and then experiment if you want to; but... then... enjoy your writing. And if you read a lot... I always tell them... you can't be a writer unless you're a reader because I think, if you just look at all the best writers the world has ever had, they've all been readers, when they were young and throughout their lives they would have been readers. So, a love of books, a love of literature, has, I think, got to be there to begin with. It's all right otherwise, if you want to be a reporter or a journalist or something.... that's maybe a different kind of writing, but to be a serious writer, I think, you also have to be a serious reader. I mean, not necessarily read everything that's written, but enjoy your reading as much as you enjoy writing. So, access to books is important and now at least people do have access to books; even bookshops are suffering but that is because people are buying on-line, which is all right, which is good for small towns where you don't have bookshops because at least people can get books that way. Publishing is doing well in India. New publishers keep popping up in Delhi all the time, which means that there is scope for good writing, as well as for popular writing. And I think if you look back ... and I was going through I had some old bound issues of Reader's Digest, going back to the 1920s, and every week they would publish a list of bestsellers; and none of those books exist to-day. The ones that we still read were not in the bestseller list then, you know. So, you can't really predict what will be read fifty years from now. But the good writing will survive, I think.

BF: And yours will.

RB: Oh, I don't know, but still, it would be nice if it does.

BF: It certainly will and your readers will make sure that your writing will. Just one final comment. Cambridge Book Depot is famous because of you. Every Saturday there are long queues. They begin at the bookshop. They go on for half a mile or a mile. They wait patiently for a signature so....

RB: Yes, I'm touched by that. In fact, the next memoir... I've dedicated it to the poor people who will stand in a line there waiting. Not to those who come banging on the door, getting me up at six in the morning. But - that's why I'm very lucky and very fortunate, and as I've got older, my readership has grown and I can't understand it... after all, my writing is no different today from what it was twenty, thirty, forty years back. Hardly any difference.

BF: Would you say that books take time to gestate?

RB: I think so. You're right. It takes time sometimes, to gestate and. if one generation... maybe... passes it on, then somehow, something just happens.

BF: As you say, you're read by three generations now.

RB: Because I never had bestsellers of any of my books that were published, but now... now I could say they're steady sellers. I mean, most of them are. And people seem to want all my autographed copies in large numbers. Maybe they think they'd better get them before I pop off!

BF: It really does increase their value. I must tell you that. That's why I have to watch the weight on planes as I go back; still we got as many as we could.

RB: They like keeping hard covers. Decent people want autographed book. Hard covers last longer, but I suggest that travellers....

BF: Yes, well, I told as you we like hard covers, because we like books, but your planes are not generous.

RB: Yes, they will become quite a weight. And once you have to move. But I can't leave this - where and how will I take all the books that I've accumulated?

BF: One final thing is: This really is just for you. I asked at the hotel – they all knew you, of course, and then when I came here there was one shop just where the bazaar began, Mandel Bazaar, and I went and asked there, and the gentleman said, “Oh, Ruskin Bond.” And he said, “Well, you know that house over there? He lives underneath there.” And then our driver said, “Can you take us there? Can you...?” because he had his own vehicle. And he said, “Give me ten minutes.” I said, “Sir, I can't give you ten minutes because I'm meeting Ruskin Bond in ten minutes.” So he left his shop, he got out his scooter and he came and he showed us where it was. And then, when we came here, I was wondering... I was looking for a cottage and this was a mansion... and so... there was a workman, so I asked him where Ivy Cottage is, Ruskin Bond's house, and he said, “Oh Jinhone kitab likhte hai?!” So a worker on a labouring site did know ‘the man who writes books.’. He told me that just there and then. I had come up and then I went down to tell the car driver and then people came round in a car and said, “What are you looking for? Ruskin Bond's house? Just go up the stairs.” So this was a passing car. So this is what Mussoorie is. You have become one of the sites!

RB: Well, I'll tell you - I'll tell you a subtle difference. Now the labourer - “Jo kitab likhte hai - the one who writes the books and then, in the early years when I came and lived at Maplewood Lodge, I would sit outside. There was a small garden there ... I'd sit with my table and typewriter and if you asked the labourers who were down the road, where Ruskin Bond would be, they would say, “Oh, that man who types all day?” So they didn't say that he “writes books”. They only knew me as a typist. The well-known typist. As some critic once said of Harold Robbins in a crit review, he referred to him as ‘That Harold Robbins, that well-known typist.’

Bashabi Fraser with Ruskin Bond

Interview of Mark Tully by Bashabi Fraser

BF: You were born in India and spent your earlier years in Calcutta. Your father was working there. Could you describe some of your memories of your childhood? You were then sent to school in Darjeeling. What was your experience there? Did these formative years in India seep into your understanding of India in later years?

MT: My experience of Calcutta, life in Calcutta, was an experience of a British Indian life. My parents were really determined that we should remain British children and, although we were living in India, we didn't play with any Indian children, we didn't have any contact with Indians apart from the servants, and we had a European nanny and one of her main jobs was to stop us getting too close to the servants. In particular, we were not meant to learn the language, which is something I bitterly regret since. And in that sort of background I was sent first of all to a school in Calcutta and then, when the war came, we British children would usually be sent back to Britain usually for education at a very young age – before five, or something like that. But thank God, from my point of view, the war came and I was taken out of the school. Well, actually, the school itself basically moved from Calcutta to Darjeeling and there were two reasons for that. One was because there was a general belief that the hot weather would spoil and damage the health of children, and the other was that there was fear, that the war could spread into India and into Calcutta; and there was a fear of bombing and all the rest of it. So we went up to Darjeeling to school and I always say those were the happiest school days of my life.

I was very proud as a schoolboy when I travelled on the train from Darjeeling because my father was the Director of the railway, which at that time gave me great kudos. But we had a remarkable headmaster called Loukes. He was a Quaker and because he was a Quaker he was not recruited into the army because he was a Conscientious Objector, and because he was a Quaker he was very liberal in his views, and he went on to have a very distinguished career in education, in academia at Oxford actually. But because of his liberal views we were allowed to run around the streets of Darjeeling. I remember we used to go to Keventers and have milkshakes there. And I always say this but it's incredible to believe now that we would go to the American soldiers' recreation camp and be given chocolates and things like that by American soldiers. Can you imagine nowadays, with all of the brouhaha which goes on, that happening? And so they were very happy school days although the education was rather strange in a way because most of the teachers were wives of army officers and as soon as the army officers came on leave, or anything like that, the wives would disappear! So a hole would be left, but somehow or other, when I got to my prep school in England, I found I was actually ahead of the other children. So it was a good academic education and it was a great education. I remember it with great happiness. I remember particularly the smell of the pine trees. That was one of the things. And I remember the sight of Kanchenjunga; and, you know, I once went round with my sister to Darjeeling and all that haze came down. We were there for four or five days and we never saw Kanchenjunga; and I said to Prue, my sister, "You know, I have a memory of seeing Kanchenjunga every day. I seem to remember that... and now, look at this." You know. So, yes, those were very happy days at Darjeeling. And it was from there that I went back to England.

BF: And your school was called?

MT: The New School. It was founded entirely for the British children. Only British children were there and... it was all a bit snobbish. I mean, you had to be the son or the daughter of a person of a

certain status, even in the British community. My father was a Burra Sahib of Gillanders Arbuthnot, so we could go there.

BF: And the school you went to in Calcutta. Do you remember what it was called?

MT: Well, it was The New School.

BF: And do you remember where you lived in Calcutta?

MT: I remember very well. Where we lived in Calcutta was Tollygunge, 7 Regent's Park... Well, I was born in 6 Regent's Park and then my parents moved to 7 Regent's Park which I think is now known as Mores Avenue, and they were lovely big bungalows with big gardens, tennis court, dovecote, all that sort of thing. Lots of servants. We had two ponies. We went for a ride every morning with Nanny. Very formal, really. We would see my parents - we were taken in to see my parents when they were having their chhota hazri, which you would know, as it is now called; and in the evening, when they were drinking sherry before supper, we would be brought down in our dressing gowns and pyjamas, and whisked away and put to bed. So we didn't see that much of our parents.

BF: You then went to study in England....

MT: Yeah....

BF: Did India stay with you while you were there? If so, in what ways? Did you make trips to India in the interim period before you came back, as Bureau Chief of the BBC in 1965? And when you did take up your BBC position, how did you feel about coming back to India which had been independent for just under two decades?

MT: Well, when I was going back to England was a huge shock. I mean, we thought it was horrible because we never wanted to leave India. We had been, you know, very happy there. And when we arrived in England, of course, the war was still just on. There was rationing. It was freezing cold and the whole of life changed because my father, my mother, who was the sort of Burra Memsahib of the house, was suddenly having to do the washing-up and all that sort of thing; and Nanny walked out because she saw there were no servants to do the hard work. So she went and worked for a rich brewing family, who could provide servants, and all the talk we heard was about finding some dreadful boarding school to send us to. So it was a nasty experience, a nasty shock really. And then I got put in this boarding school, which was a complete contrast to The New School because it was surrounded by high walls and you only went out on Sunday, in a crocodile, for a walk across Twyford Downs and it was a totally enclosed sort of life. And I didn't like it very much, really, and one of the things I was very proud of my Indian background. Of course, it made me different from most of the other boys and one of the things I used to do was insist on running races and things in bare foot because I thought that was an Indian thing to do, you know. So I did that and I retained my memories of India. But as I got older those memories faded rather. I got more and more involved in Britain and well settled. We moved to a house outside Manchester, in the countryside, in Cheshire. We had a lovely house there. We had a happy holiday life and then of course, I had all the business of surviving in boarding schools, private and public, and so I think in all that the memory of India slightly faded, you know. It wasn't with me as much as it was when I first went back.

BF: How did you feel about coming back to India which had been independent for just under two decades?

MT: Yes, well you know, I never came back to India until the BBC asked me to. It would have been inconceivable really, to come back to India during that time. One had no links there, no-one there, nothing there, you know. So I did the normal things: travelled in Europe and that sort of thing. And then I joined the BBC and when I joined the BBC eventually after university and theological college, I was recruited into the Personnel Department and I was in those days I was a Socialist and a strong Christian and I thought that the Personnel Department would be to do with welfare and caring for people and that sort of thing. And of course, it was much more than it is now. It was called 'Personnel' rather than 'Human Resources', which I think is a terrible title myself, which seems to be organisations for merely hiring and firing people. So I got this job in the Personnel Department but I hated it. I had been living in the countryside in Cheshire with my previous job. I had to live in London, which I really disliked, and I had this job, and so much of it was paperwork – files and that sort of thing – and the main purpose of my job was to sit on Appointments Boards for all sorts of jobs because in those days, in the BBC, any job had to be advertised internally. I was one of the people who used to be on those Appointments Boards. And it was very uncomfortable because I knew nothing really about broadcasting and there I was, sort of judging people who'd been making television programmes for ten years or radio programmes, and all the rest of it... and I was flanked by people who knew all about it, by the Heads of Department, I always used to be saying to myself, "What on earth do they think about this idiot here who knows nothing about the job we were looking for someone to fill." But my job was to see that fair play was done and try and make sure that no-one could complain to the unions about the conduct of the Boards. So I didn't like it and then a notice came on the board about a vacancy in the Delhi office, to be Assistant Representative. Then, of course, India came back to me in a big way and I thought to myself, "My goodness!" I have always been a great believer in Life making you, rather than you making Life, in a way, with things happening to you, to guide you where you should go and I suddenly thought to myself, "I think this must be the answer. I would love to go back to India. Maybe India is the answer for me." Because as I told you, I had had various jobs before I joined the BBC. I'd failed to become a priest. I'd messed around a bit without really knowing where I was going. And I felt I no real loyalty to where I lived in London, no sense of belonging, and that had always been something important to me. So I thought, "Gosh, supposing I get this job. That may be the turning point I was waiting for." And of course, it proved to be so. And I'll just tell you a little story about getting the job, which goes back to the fact that I was never allowed to learn the language in India; and what happened. They said to me during the Appointments Board was, "You've had ten years of your life in India. You must speak the language very well." Well, I said, "No, we weren't allowed to learn it." Then I suddenly thought and I said, "But I do know Humpty Dumpty and Little Miss Muffet in Hindi!" Well, I thought, "I've blown it! I've blown it!" But they all laughed and took it in a nice spirit, you know.

BF: Wonderful! That's a wonderful story. Was India very different now to you from the India you had experienced as a child? Had India changed or had your own perspective about India changed?

MT: Yes, the whole thing was completely different, really. When I arrived in India, well, first of all I had this experience on the first day. I got off the flight. It had been a long flight. I'd never been on a long flight before. I wasn't travelling with my family. I was all on my own. I didn't know what on earth the job was, what I was actually to do. So I was feeling a bit disoriented and I smelled the smell of malis [gardeners] on the veranda, I smelled the smell of malis cooking their food on their balti [bucket] stoves and the smoke of that cow dung was exactly the same smell as the smoke from

the servants' quarter in my parents' house in Calcutta. And I always say this, that the whole of my childhood went through my head like an electric train. It was an extraordinary experience. And from that moment on I can honestly say, I don't know what it is, but there's something special about India for me. And of course the huge and immediate difference was that I was made very, very, welcome by people from the All India Radio. They looked after me splendidly and I made friends. You know, I made friends for a lifetime with them. and, of course, they were all Indian. And there was no sign of, you know, of any sort of European society or anything like that, as there had been when I was young. And I immediately thought to myself, "Well, how lucky I am to be in India under these circumstances, rather than to be in India where I might have been expected to live according to the dictates of British society in India. So that was really a huge difference. But there were the smells, sights, sunshine, food – all those sorts of things were there to make you feel very much a part of the past as well, and that was what did make you feel at home.

BF: When did you decide to make India the subject of your writing? Are there any particular reasons as to why you wanted to write about India?

MT: Well, I have to be honest, I never thought of myself as a writer. I evolved into being what I thought of myself as a jobbing radio journalist. That's what I like doing and that's what I was reasonably good at doing. So I never really thought about writing, you know, and indeed I never thought, really, about making long features on radio and that sort of thing, or television. I really thought I was perfectly happy, and I enjoyed reporting and I had no ambition to do anything else. And then one day the BBC asked me to make a radio series called 'From Raj to Rajiv' - about the first forty years of Indian independence. And in that I had the privilege of working with a wonderful man called Zareer Masani who was a very good historian, and that series was a success and, you know, Zareer liked my scripts and we then wrote a book together. Well, we put this programme into book form together. He wrote one chapter and I wrote the next and so it went on. So I thought to myself, "Well, you know, maybe I can write a bit." But I didn't do much about it at all until the Punjab crisis. So, with the Punjab crisis, I got so interested and so involved in it and I had my long standing Indian colleague - Satish Jacob - he and I had worked together so much on it - that I decided to ask an agent whether they could sell a book on the Punjab crisis. And they said, "Yes." And there's another funny story about this because I was actually up in Kasauli, in the hill station, writing this book happily and then Indira Gandhi died. So my agent sent me a letter, not an e-mail, a telex or whatever it was in this days saying, 'Cancel your book and write a biography of Indira Gandhi'. And I said, "Look, I have a job. I have all the notes and everything to do on the Punjab, but I don't have the notes and everything to do a book on Indira Gandhi." And I didn't hear any more and I went on with the Punjab book but, of course, I included a chapter on Operation Blue Star and the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Then I went back to London, to discuss the book, and my publisher, a chap called Tom Maschler, who was a very famous publisher with Jonathan Cape. But just before I left, this agent sent me a telex, or whatever it was then, saying, 'The publisher has just told me he does not want your book on the Punjab, so you'd better write a book on Indira Gandhi.' So I went to see Tom and I said to him, "Tom I've written this Punjab book, the first book I was asked to write. Mrs. Gandhi is in it and now you say you don't want it." He was livid and he said, "Who says I don't want it?" I said, "Well, my agent said it." He said, "What absolute..." and then a very rude word. "Yes, of course I want the book."

And so the book was published. And so then I began to think that, 'O.K. that's fine. I've done that.' I became more confident and then the BBC gave me a wonderful three or four months' break. So that was when I decided I would go on writing a book on my own and that was when I wrote No Full

Stops in India. And I wrote that. I always write books with great trepidation. I almost always find that in the middle of a book I say to Gilly, “This is all rubbish,” and, “Let’s forget it.” And I’ve always loved the research. I love writing about things I’ve seen and done and that sort of thing, and I wrote *No Full Stops*, and from then onwards, well, I only wanted to write about India and I wanted to go on living in India and I wanted to say some things about India. All my books have a sort of, what I call, a didactic theme, you know, like *No Full Stops* was all about trying to decolonise India and some of the other books have been about the shocking bad governance of India and that sort of thing. But even to this day, I am a very uncertain writer. And I’ve just written a collection of short stories, and again, I was very uncertain. This is the second collection I’ve written, and if I write again, I think I will go back to reportage again, you know. But, I don’t know, I’m 82, so, really, in a way, my writing is like the whole of my life. It’s been dictated by circumstances. I became a writer as far as I’m a writer, because of circumstances not because I thought, Oh, I’m a great writer,” or anything like that, you know. And you know, when I was a jobbing journalist and we’d all go on a big story, you know. When you go on a big story, a great gang of journalists go. It’s great fun and great friendships and camaraderie, and I remember. A journalist who had to write long pieces would sometimes be at the bar and then they’d say, “I have to go and write now,” and I would say, “you don’t actually go and write. You’re just going to file this story.” So I was not considering myself a writer by nature or anything like that.

BF: You definitely are a writer. I think a lot of people will disagree with what you’ve just said. Can we go on?

MT: Yes.

BF: Your listeners loved your radio programme, *Something Understood*. Would you say that research for this programme and the respect and affection with which it was received by your audience, helped in the transition from radio journalism to print journalism which retained India as the thematic core of your writing?

MT: I don’t think I would say that, actually. *Something Understood* is again, an illustration of the way things happen to me. I had left the BBC. I was a bad boy. I had made a speech attacking John Birt. I’d asked to present a programme on Sunday morning for six o’clock and I said, “I’m not going to come back to England to present this programme so I’m not much interested anyhow.” And, by great good fortune, the programme was a very broad brief indeed and it had been provided by the controller of Radio 4, Michael Greene who liked my work and he told the production company Unique, “If you can get Mark Tully to do it, you can have the programme.” And he said, “He can do lots of programmes in India every year.” Because we did the programmes, still do them, in bulk, you know. He said, “and he can come back to London twice a year,” which of course was very nice of him. So that was an offer I couldn’t resist and it’s turned into one of the most important things in my life. One of the things I’m happiest about in my life and I think I can honestly say, if it’s not arrogant, is, I’m rather proud about it you know. Because we did start it. It was just completely unformed, the idea. But, of course, as indeed everything in broadcasting, is a team effort and I have the most wonderful producers and researchers and you know, it’s exciting as well. Tremendously exciting when you the interviewees that I have met and the response of the audience has been lovely. I can’t say any more than that, you know. But it hasn’t really impacted on my writing except for one book, which was *India’s Unending Journey*. And that arose, yes, out of something I’d stored away out of my own religious beliefs, out of my own prejudices... very strong prejudices. My dislike of management culture, my dislike of businesses and all that sort of side of the world. My belief in the

unity of all religions - all those things came into that. And so that was very much influenced by *Something Understood*, which I'm very much aware of. And I think that would never have happened, again, if it hadn't been for a lovely editor called Judith Kendra, from Random House, who came to India and asked to see me and we were having a drink together and she said, "Why don't write a book with some of your *Something Understood* thoughts. and one of her briefs was Religious Books. So I said, "Well, I'd love to have a shot at it", and that's how it came about, you know. And, to be honest, I've always wanted to do something like that again. I still may do but then, I've got waylaid by other things and but that's the one which is nearest to my heart.

BF: Ever since your BBC days you have been writing about India. In your first two books, *Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle* (1985) and *Raj to Rajiv: 40 Years of Indian Independence* (1988 *India: Forty Years of Independence*, co-authored with Satish Jacob and Zareer Masani respectively), would you say that your own journalistic career gave you the experience of material gathering methods and insightful perceptions? In both books you have followed the Indian political situation closely and while the former is a focussed account of a momentous event which marks a turning point in India's political history (Operation Blue Star), the second traces the journey India took after Independence till Indira's Emergency, her assassination and Rajiv's political ascendancy. What brought you to write both these books on India's recent and past history? Was the second book your own personal journey to familiarize yourself with and understand how Indian politics permeates everyday life in India?

MT: Well, yes, I think I wrote quite a lot of that.... on the last point.... yes... I think the main ambition, not just with that book but with many of my books, has been to somehow make the point that Indian politics are, in a way, the thing which is holding India back. Indian politics and India's governance and that, as I said in one of my books, the politicians and the bureaucrats have joined hands to rule the country. But I think it's much more than that and I'll tell you a funny story which will illustrate this. You see, after the economic reforms there was a big cheer, three cheers, and everything was going to be wonderful... and a very good friend of mine called Gurcharan Das wrote a book called *India Unbound* and I wrote a book called *India in Slow Motion*.

I wrote *India in Slow Motion* because I was convinced that India was not unbound but was still bound up by bureaucracy and by the politicians. A couple of years later... well quite a lot later, Gurcharan Das and I were doing a joint interview for the BBC and I said to him, "Gurcharan, you wrote a book called *India Unbound*, I wrote a book called *India in Slow Motion*. Now, which do you think was right?" He smiled and said, "I think you really have a point." But this is a fundamental. I believe that India really has to get a grip of the administration of the bureaucracy, and all the corruption which flows from it. And I always thought it very important to make the point that India is... the corruption is a result of the system. It's not, corruption is not the cause. Corruption is the system of a rottenness, is the only word I can use, system of governance, you know. And that is why again we made the point in *India: The Road Ahead*, that the road ahead has to be doing something about this, you know. The other thing I've always tried to make in my broadcasting and in my writing is the point that I still firmly believe in India's secularism, although I don't really like the word 'secularism' because I believe India is a multi-faith and I think it's a deeply religious country, but I believe that, at heart, it is a country which is able to cope with many different faiths and has done for hundreds of years; so much so that, of course, when I wrote my last book I had a chapter on this... and in that, if I remember rightly, I virtually said because we'd had a BJP, a Hindu party government under Vajpayee for five years and there've been no communal trouble, no attempt to communalise the situation and because Vajpayee and Advani both realised and both told me that the old

communal agenda, anyhow, is too narrow and if you go too far down that route, it won't work, they said, "We have to be a broad party, right-wing and of the centre." So I wrote that Congress should stop shouting about secularism and they should both get on with the political and economic agenda. Of course, since I wrote that we have had a very, very different government, you know, and Hindutva has become the dominant ideology of the ruling party and perhaps I should write a book about that.

BF: O.K. The first book I read of yours, which my husband, Neil gifted to me, was *No Full Stops in India* (1988). I find the title fascinating. Could you tell me what made you choose this title? In this book you move across varied subjects, from your cook Ram Chunder's story, the Kumbha Mela, Roop Kanwar's sati, Jangarh Singh Shyam's rare artistic career, to Rajiv's various constitutional blunders which have had repercussions in subsequent Indian politics. You even have a chapter on Calcutta's communists. What has impressed me is your unbiased position, your ability to see both sides of the argument, hear rival voices out and amidst these diverse voices and opinions, try to paint a balanced view of this complex country. How do you do this? In fact, you are more willing to give India a 'good press' as it were, than many of her Indian critics would on several controversial issues. Is it too simplistic to say that for you India is a romance which you wish to cherish and keep in spite of the upheavals you witness around you?

MT: Well yes, I have often been accused of being romantic about India, of being soft on India. One simple answer to this is I think far too many people have been hard on India, but India has made me. India has always welcomed me. India has treated me with great generosity. I have Indian friends galore. I wouldn't be sitting here with you in this beautiful flat in Delhi if I didn't want to remain identified with India and basically, I'd say India has made me, and therefore I have to see good in it as well as bad, because you know, if you say a place is completely rotten, caste-ridden or corrupt and all the rest of it, has made me what I am. This is the place I'm loyal to. Well, people would say, "Well, why are you loyal to it?" you know. So, even before I started writing I used to say to people in the BBC, "You know, yes, there's poverty; yes, there's corruption; yes, there's scarcity" as there was in those days, and all the rest of it. "But there are wonderful things about this country. Why don't you represent them?" And I remember one of the funny things - when television teams used to come to this country the first thing they would do - they'd want to go and photograph a vulture because the vulture to them was the emblem of this country; a country so poor, that vultures were gathering to peck away. And I said at a meeting of editors in London -/when I was back in London once, I said to them, "I just wish you people would realise that the peacock, not the vulture, is the bird of India." And, you know, sometimes, just sometimes, especially of an evening, I think, when I go for a walk in Lodhi Gardens where they've got marvellous monuments and the sun is setting and the light and everything - and you just think to yourself, "Well, whatever's wrong with this, this is a great, great country, and with a great history, and it's very important - for if India doesn't prosper in the end, if it doesn't solve its problems, well, its very bad for the whole world." So I think it's right to see India with sympathy. I've always thought that; but equally, I think you have to point out what's wrong, and especially in the present circumstances. I'm very aware of this country and I fear that my great dream - what I've dreamed all along -: that this country of many faiths, which is a unique example to the world, and that that dream will be shattered, you know, I fear that, although, equally, I say to myself, "I'm sure it won't be," People always tell me, "You've gone native." But I always say to them, "Well, you know, you're a colonialist, because 'You've gone native' is a colonial phrase."

BF: You have continued to write about India in *India in Slow Motion* (2002, with Gillian Wright), covering the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, Sufism in India, the repercussion of the international

campaign against child labour on the carpet industry in India, investigative journalism and corruption in defence deals, Goa's complex religious history, the crisis in agriculture, the Kashmir issue. You are a writer who likes to base your analysis on 'authenticity', a first-hand experience through your travels which bring you in touch with places and people and help to shape the narrative. Would you say that this is a method that has worked for you to come closer to India and have a deeper understanding of her apparent contradictions? What you do show through your challenges, through your own encounters with the many prisms through which India can be viewed are the challenges to the 'certainties' we may harbour about India. How have you managed to keep an open mind, sift through the many layers of possibilities and opinions, the different versions of reality and even 'truth' and yet retain your affection for India?

MT: Well I think one of the reasons why my affection for India is very strong is because it has weathered many storms, if I can put it that way. But I think the answer is also that, of course, it actually grows deeper by doing this type of writing because you meet so many fascinating people, you enter into fascinating people's lives, you see different aspects of India, and you see some horrible things, but, on the whole, you see so many wonderful people and you get helped by so many wonderful people. I think, talking about the particular book you were mentioning, of Hemant, the agriculturalist who helped us on the agricultural story, a wonderful man who dedicated his whole life to serving farmers and to agriculture in the broadest sense of the word. And you know, you go back to *No Full Stops in India* there was Ram Chandra my long time cook. I wouldn't have spent the night in his village, if I hadn't been writing those sorts of stories. So I think, in a way, it certainly does take you on a journey, which I think for a journalist is very important. It takes you off the beaten track of journalism, and I think that is very important. And it also it enables you to write about rural India, and I don't think there's nearly enough writing about rural India.

BF: In *India's Unending Journey* (2008) you base your writing on interviews, anecdotes and observations, zooming from Puri, to Delhi, to Raipur in the east, and contemplate the Western dimension in the role of English education (Marlborough), your Cambridge affiliation and encounter there and Pope John Paul the 2nd's visit to Maynooth in Ireland. However, your Western journeys bring you back again and again to India – to burning questions like that of untouchability, communal tensions, as well as the capitalist boom, e.g., in Gurgaon. The Indian reality, her traditions and transformations seem to have a magnetic hold on you. It is almost as if you cannot get away from this vast sub-continent – with its intolerances, its flares of violence, its generous heart, its pluralism and its resilience – all painted by you in book after book. Could you describe the hold India continues to have on you and why?

MT: Well, I think there are the personal reasons. As I have told you, I'm a believer in Fate. I'm a believer in Life making you just as much as you make it yourself. And you know, I never expected when I first came back to India that I would stay here and I didn't, I just went to London twice, but when I came back to India a third time, it seemed to me obvious that God was in the end saying you should stay in India. And so I have stayed in India, and of course, when you live in a country you are fascinated by everything that happens in that country. And so, I think in a way, the fascination comes out of the fact that I just simply have lived here so long and I feel that it has been my fate to live here.

BF: In *India: The Road Ahead* (Non-Stop India 2011) you take up big questions – India's vast and growing demography, her democratic structure, her ability to be self-sustaining in food in the future and the socio-economic discrepancies of her many marginalised groups/her minorities. Once again

you interview a wide strata of society (business people, cricketers, diplomats, politicians, travellers at home and abroad), to give the reader glimpses into what people are thinking/what they believe. Here again, your own reflections propel the narrative and hold it together. Your minute observation, your ability to listen to varied opinions, to weave a middle path between radical views while never losing sight of retaining your hope in a future for India, are apparent here. What gives you this inner strength to carry on believing in India's resilience and her assured future?

MT: Well, I suppose what gives me confidence is the evidence I see of the stability, the basic stability of India. And I've always thought of India as being like a great ocean liner. It gets knocked about by storms, you'd think it's going to capsize but, somehow or other, it rights itself and goes on again. And you see that in so many cases. I'll quote one example - when the mosque was pulled down in Ayodhya and all around the world people were saying, 'This is the end of secular democracy in India' and I used to say, 'well I don't think it is. In India things go up quickly and go down quickly.' And that's what happened. And I'm hoping, of course, that this present situation and the promotion of communalism that is going at the moment won't last very long.

BF: Your two fictional books - *The Heart of India* and your most recent book, *Upcountry Tales: Once Upon A Time In The Heart Of India* (2017) – are about India. You show a compassion which makes your stories quite moving. You illustrate a deep understanding of women's issues, of problems people face at the grassroots and ponder on continuing social practices. Have your stories about India resonated with a Western audience? Do you find your Indian readers and Western readers respond to your books differently?

MT: You know, one of the strange things about me is I never really want to find out about what's happened to my books. I don't know how many copies of my latest short stories have sold, so in that way I don't know how well they have been presented/ rated? Of course, they haven't been published in Britain yet. I hope they will be but maybe they won't. But people who have read the latest ones, *Upcountry Tales* - the stories have resonated with the Indians as they've told me and, of course, I'm pleased about that. I do think, as I've said in answer to your earlier question, we really need more writing about rural India and rural India fascinates me and I've spent quite a bit of time there and I hope that these stories will lead other people to write about rural India.

BF: Excellent.

MT: If I were to be critical, I would say there's far too much writing about middle-class India.

BF: Would you say that your body of work offers a multifaceted view of contemporary India? Would you say that through the decades that you have lived in India, your views have been influenced /shaped by a changing India? Though much remains traditional and recognisable in India, it has changed a lot in recent years. Do you recognise it as the country you chose to live in or do you feel it has changed beyond your expectations? Have these changes altered or affected your own writing and your perspective on India?

MT: Well, yes, of course, I've tried to write about some of these changes and one of the questions my friend, Judith Kendra, who edited two of my books - she said, when she read *Upcountry Tales*, she said, 'This is fine but it's all about India's history, the Rajiv Gandhi period. Why is it not about India to-day and all the changes?' And I explained that, because to keep a unity I thought you needed to do one period and this was a crucial period, because it was before the economic reforms, so the last

days of the old licence permits, the old socialist, rather over rigid socialist structure.’ But it did make me realise that perhaps I should write about the changes which had occurred. I had done articles and things like that and I am not entirely happy about the changes which had occurred and I think large numbers of them really need to be controlled and the obvious example is urbanisation. It is ridiculous we now have twenty-three million in the inner city which, when I first came here, was four and a half million. And you see for yourself. There’s no planning, virtually. It’s one huge, enormous, great urban sprawl. When you go in the countryside you see this. I think it’s called peri-urbanisation, the urbanisation of villages and small towns; and you see again, it is completely unplanned. And sometimes really beautiful countryside. You see that in the Himalayan villages - when you go into the Himalayas, it’s awful what’s happening there. So, yes, one does need to write about all these things and be very critical.

BF: Would you say that your immediate, intimate experience of India makes you a very different writer writing on India, from those who write from a distance or after cursory/brief visits to India?

MT: Yes, I would but I wouldn’t like to criticise anyone else’s writing. And there are different methods for different ways of writing. You know, it’s rather like the foreign correspondent. Some foreign correspondents are correspondents who hop from country a country and they do a very good job, they go from one crisis to another, and others are those who live a long-ish time and get to know the country a bit better and obviously their writings are different. But I think some people, take Naipaul. He has a great innate understanding of India, anyhow. But you wouldn’t say that Naipaul is naïve and always a great writer simply because when he came to India he came from short visits. So I think it is perfectly justified. But obviously mine are slightly different. Well, I hope they are, slightly different because otherwise what would be the point of my staying here?

BF: Would you be happy to give an account of what living and writing in India means to you as an author after all the books you have written so far? In the past few years India has been transformed beyond what many of us have envisioned for India? Do you see yourself happy to continue to live in this India, and is it an India you have foreseen/anticipated? Do you still believe that India will reaffirm her pluralism and live up to her reputation of being a tolerant nation which celebrates her diversity?

MT: As far as going on living in India I can only say that I have no plans to leave India. I mean, I will say that I’ll have to leave some time. At my age, it might not be that far away. And God knows what lies in the future. So I think it’s foolish to say ‘never’ in life. I can’t say, ‘I’ll never leave India,’ but I have absolutely no plans at the moment to leave India, for the fact that we are sitting in this beautiful flat in Delhi. I’m very happy to be in this particular part of Delhi, historic part of Delhi, right next door to one of the greatest, one of the two great Sufi shrines of India, the shrine of Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya. So, whatever happens in this country I think it’s unlikely that that will make me think of leaving.

BF: You have received the highest awards in both Britain and India as a writer – all are well deserved. How does it feel to be recognised in both countries?

MT: Well, fame is a fickle mistress. If I took these awards the recognition too seriously, it would be very very bad for me. You know in India we believe that what is paramount in spiritual life tends to damp down the self, to unite the self with God, and so I should be thinking about uniting myself with God and about God and not about blowing up my ego by rejoicing in people saying, “We recognised

you”, or wanting to take a photograph or calling me Sir Mark Tully or something like that. The long and the short of it is that I try, and I hope I’m successful, in not being swept off my feet by whatever notoriety I do have. You know, when you are recognised in airport for instance, people start wanting to take photographs of you. It’s embarrassing and a nuisance, you know. That’s just one example.

I have often wondered whether I should have accepted these awards, and when I told Julie I’d been offered a knighthood she said, ‘You shouldn’t accept it,’ but in the end, I thought to myself, it would be churlish not to accept the award. People have had the generosity, the kindness and all the rest of it, to offer you an award, so you should accept it. I also thought there is something rather self-glorifying about not accepting the award, you know. ‘Well, I’m Mark Tully I’m a big guy. What’s an award to me?’ That type of thing, and sometimes people who have done this, you felt that actually there was more self glorification in their excuse than in their receiving it. So yes, I certainly can tell you that there are two sides to being somewhat recognised. And, after all, I’m not that recognized.

BF: Are you working on something now? Would you be happy to share this with your readers?

MT: I’d be very happy to share it if I was. What I’m doing at the moment? I was taken a bit poorly last year; that was a bit of a setback. But I’ve recovered from that now. I have one problem in that I keep on getting request, people ask me to write blurbs for their book, so I have to read their books. To put it simply, I seem to be very busy, but I don’t seem to be doing very much, but I hope that maybe I’ll start doing a bit more. Of course, the one thing I am still doing - and I don’t know for how much longer, is my beloved *Something Understood*, and I love it.

Bashabi Fraser with Mark Tully

Interview with Patrick French by Bashabi Fraser

BF: You've been writing about India for some time. When did you decide to make India the subject of your writing? Are there particular reasons as to why you wanted to write about India?

PF: Well, the origin of this story is a little bit unlikely in that I grew up in rural England, in Wiltshire, in the West Country, and I had no family connection at all to India, or to South Asia. In other words, I didn't have the story that you find with a lot of British writers or British historians where maybe their great-grandfather had a tea plantation or was a missionary or was involved in the Indian Civil Service. I had no connection at all. My interest was kindled by reading newspaper reports of politics in India during the 1970s, as a child. I remember being fascinated by Indira Gandhi as a political figure. I was also interested in Pakistan. The first thing that I remember writing for the public was in 1979 when Zulfikar Bhutto was executed by General Zia who, at that time, was in charge of Pakistan after his take-over. So I wrote a letter to the Daily Telegraph newspaper in London saying, "It is a politically unwise move to go ahead with this execution." At that time Bhutto was in jail and the question for Zia was: would he or wouldn't he execute his rival? I thought it would probably rebound on him politically, and that also, in principle, if you're having a fight with a political opponent you don't need to execute them. Anyway, so I drafted a letter and had a polite reply from the editor, saying, "Thank you for your contribution Patrick, aged 12, but we're not going to publish it, although we're very interested to hear what you had to say." So that's the kind of identifiable starting point of my interest in the subcontinent but, what's strange, looking back, is that I wasn't especially interested in the cultural side, the music, the film, the British connection, all of these obvious routes for a foreigner to become involved in India. It was a fascination with India and a fascination with politics, as it was happening in the 1970s and 80s. You had a supplementary question that I didn't address?

BF: Are there particular reasons that made you want to write about India?

PF: When it came to actually writing about India as an adult, I think the starting point was that I was interested in Tibet. I had been to Tibet in 1986, when I was a student at Edinburgh University, studying English Literature. I'd also been to India for the first time, on a budget. I went to Bombay, Dharamshala, Kashmir, parts of Rajasthan and it was when I began to write my first book, which was a biography of the nineteenth century explorer and mystic, Francis Younghusband, that India became important to the story. So, for example, I followed him over the Rohtang Pass in Himachal, on one of his first important journeys into Lahaul and Spiti. I was also following the route of his 1903 invasion of Tibet, from Darjeeling up to Sikkim. So that was the first time that I actually wrote about India and, in order to do the biography, I had to get across the history of the later colonial period. So Younghusband's involvement is really from the 1880s, when he's a fairly standard young cavalry officer, to the 1930s, when he becomes an Indian nationalist. So, in a way he reflected a larger political or historical narrative. So that was the beginning of writing about India and then, indirectly, that book led to me becoming interested in Partition and Indian independence in 1947.

BF: Your first book, which you have just spoken about, was on Francis Younghusband, for which you traced his steps across Central Asia, and it won the Somerset Maugham Prize. Would you say that this is the same method you employ to write about India, journeying across it to observe for yourself and thus gathering your material?

street level conversation. I could walk out of my house now, go into the street and stop ten people and ask them a political question. “Do you like Modi?” “Do you like the Aam Aadmi Party?” “Are you a Congress Party supporter?” Or I could ask them a general question about their lives. In India, most of those people will talk to you very happily, even for quite a long time. And that is something that is built-in, that sense that you have the right to express an opinion. Your opinion might be ignored, of course; in fact, it is likely to be ignored, but you can still express it. Whereas in Tibet, everybody I spoke to on that trip in 1999, without exception, suffered a potential personal cost from talking to me. They were frightened to speak. Now that could mean, if they were in any way a dissident, that they would be arrested and interrogated and put in prison. It could mean, for those who had an official position, that it could put their job in jeopardy. They might be, for example, put under the watch of the Communist Party surveillance within their institution. So almost every conversation that generated material for the book had to be done in secrecy, and I had to be very careful about how I kept my notes. I had to anonymise my notes so that nobody could be identified if the notes were picked up. I also didn’t dare to use cameras or recording devices because I thought, that’s just too too risky and I know people who have done that in Tibet successfully and have smuggled out the material, but I didn’t want to do that. So actually getting the material for what ends up as two pages of Tibet, Tibet was extremely difficult. And then there was the language issue: different dialects of Tibetan, some interviews being done in Chinese, making sure the interpreter I was using in a particular place was somebody trustworthy. It was an extremely difficult book to pull off.

BF: But you did.

PF: But I did. There’s actually one conversation in there which was done entirely from memory...

BF: Wow!

PF: Yes, a Chinese Communist Party official who had been in Tibet from soon after what they call the Liberation, so in 1950 or 1951, and I knew that if I’d pulled out a notebook the conversation wasn’t going to happen, and we had this very, very, intense conversation. I made mental notes as I went along, went back to my hotel room in Lhasa and wrote it out.

BF: That’s amazing!

PF: I’ve always hoped I didn’t get anything wrong. But you know, there have been people in Tibet who’ve been in communication with me subsequent to the book and I don’t think I got anything wrong.

BF: I’m sure you didn’t because it’s out there and you haven’t had any -

PF: - comebacks? Yes.

BF: So both Younghusband and Tibet are histories. Would you say that you brought a similar approach to Liberty or Death – India’s Journey to Independence and Division, in which you look at India’s Independence history and immediate aftermath in a historical re-appraisal of India’s struggle and the politics which resulted in the vivisection of the nation?

PF: Some how I think that was a bit of a different book. I mean, there are moments towards the end

PF: Well I guess to an extent I've been influenced by the subaltern approach to history, in that the voices that come from the ground up tend for me to be appealing and important. Which is not to say that I'm not interested in traditional, diplomatic or narrative history... but, to me, what you get at ground level can be highly revealing. So there is some similarity in the way that I might write about the present, or the recent past, and the way that I write historical biography. I should also say that in some editions of my book, *India – a Portrait*, the publishers used a sort of advertising line which was 'A Biography of 1.2 Billion People' because there were elements of biographical depiction of individuals in order to tell a larger social and cultural story. So what I was trying to do in that book was to take somebody who represented, let's say, a lot of money being made in the 1990s as a result of economic reform, and also somebody who was significantly disadvantaged and had a terrible life at the same time, and make those individuals, through their biography, representative of a larger trend. I was trying to distil twenty years of observation of India into individual stories that could represent something larger. So I deliberately sought out people who might be illustrative of a point that I was trying to communicate.

BF: Very good. What you've just said will probably feed into cascade into the next section. You also have a book on Tibet's history, which you've just spoken about, which you call *A Lost Land* and it is, as the title says, a personal history. Would you say that there is the spark of a travel writer in you when you write about histories of a person, Younghusband, or a land, Tibet, or one who likes to base his analysis on authenticity? A first-hand experience through your travels, which bring you in touch with places and people, have helped to shape the narrative. Would you say that this is a method you use to write about India?

PF: I suppose it is, but the thing that I'm realising as I speak to you is that the beginning of writing about India and the beginning of writing about the Himalayas and about Tibet were all, for me, part of the same process. So, to some extent, I was not segregating India geographically. Instead, I was trying to write about a region, a very large part of Asia, which happened to be of personal interest to me. So I think that was the route in.

The crucial point to make here about Tibet is that when I was writing *Tibet, Tibet: A Personal History of a Lost Land* in the early 2000s, I was trying to write the story from the ground up of individuals whose story could present a larger picture, but I was also talking about a personal journey that was partly physical, having been to Tibet, as you know, in my teens. But it was also a personal, political, social and to an extent an ideological journey, in that I'd been very involved in the Free Tibet movement from the late 80s until the late-1990s. I had then, to an extent, become disillusioned by it and felt that political campaigning, whether it was around human rights or democracy or how the government in Beijing operated, was over-idealistic and it was very hard to drive policy change on the ground in Tibet, or in China, simply by demonstrating or by running a campaign in a Western capital. So, I... to an extent, reacted against the Free Tibet movement that I felt had lost its way. That upset a lot of people – but that's another story. The personal journey, to me, needed to be incorporated into the story because if I'd sought to write an objective long history of Tibet without mentioning that I'd had that personal participation in the Free Tibet movement, I felt that it would be intellectually dishonest and wouldn't really tell the whole story.

The second point about this relates to what I said earlier, which is that I was trying to do the same thing, of taking an individual and letting their story tell, or paint, a bigger picture. Now, in terms of doing that, executing that, you couldn't really have a bigger contrast than India and Tibet. One of the things that people in India often do not realise is how free, comparatively, they are in their everyday

where I used the ground level individual stories of people who'd been displaced by Partition, who'd ended up in a different part of India, people who'd become part of India's political story, people who had to migrate to Bangladesh or Pakistan. I did some interviews. But most of the book is archival. It draws heavily on a twelve-volume edited edition of the documents around Indian Independence and Partition, called *The Transfer of Power*. Each volume is about a thousand pages long and every volume was published by H.M.S.O., Her Majesty's Stationery Office. One of the reviews when it was published described *The Transfer of Power* as a 'Sutra Series' because it presented one of the most complete accounts of the political process by which power was given from one group, meaning the British government in India or the British-controlled government in India, to another group, which was the Congress-led interim government that then became the first government of independent India which, two and a half years later, generated the Indian Constitution. And to have documentation at that level of not only the dialogue and conversation that two people, or five people might have at a crucial moment of that period between 1942 and 1947, but also, in many cases, to get individual notes on it. So somebody would go back and then send a letter off to someone else saying, "Well, this is what really happened and this is what so-and-so said to me," and I remember thinking this was such a beautiful resource. You were working archivally, but you didn't have the effort of having to transcribe all the letters because it had all been done by this team under Nicholas Mansergh, and it had all been very, very carefully edited and annotated. So I think, purely in structural terms, the resource on which the book rested was the transfer of power documents.

BF: Your excellent biography of V.S. Naipaul, *The World is What It is*, shows how Naipaul too travelled to India, to write his books on India. Books which allowed... books which showed his changing opinion after each visit.' How have your experiences in India shaped your writing? And would you say that your immediate intimate experience of India makes you a very different writer writing on India from those who write from a distance or after cursory/brief visits to India? Also, how do you think your own approach to India, your depiction of it, differs from Naipaul's?

PF: O.K. So let me start with the Naipaul question. I think the significant thing that affected a lot of Naipaul's writing on India was the fact that he had a strong idea of India when he was growing up in Trinidad, which at that time was a British Crown Colony, in the 1930s and 1940s. His family, like other Indian origin families in Trinidad, had come there through the Indentured Labour system, effectively a form of time-controlled or time-bound slavery, that had brought his grandparents' generation to Trinidad. Like a lot of people in Trinidad in the 1930s and 40s they were influenced by the change that was happening in India, by the prospect of a freedom movement, by figures like Gandhi and Azad and Nehru, who, in this very ambitious way projected a nationalist utopia, the idea that, once the foreign colonial power had been driven out, you could create a new and dynamic and coherent nation. So, I think people in Trinidad, as in other colonised or partially-colonised countries globally at that time, in the middle of the twentieth century were very influenced by that. But when Naipaul landed up in Bombay in 1962 the thing that was most shocking to him, which had, you know, put this very strong mark on him in his writing, was the fact that, for the first time in his life, he was anonymous in a crowd. He was just one Indian man walking in the street in Bombay. People would speak to him in Hindi or in Marathi or whatever, assuming that he would be able to reply, and I think that it had a sort of psychic effect, a traumatic psychic effect, on him - that idea of being anonymised in the crowd and to an extent, with his subsequent writing, he built the idea of his own individuality, the idea that he had something different and specific and even unique to say about where India had reached in the 1960s. And that very much comes out in his first book, *An Area of Darkness*, where a lot of the optimism and idealism that there had been about India in the late 1940s, early 1950s, had dissipated. You had a war with China looming, you had economic growth not having taken off in the

way it was meant to, and I think there were elements of what at the time looked like the cynicism of Naipaul's appraisal, that subsequently turned out to be informed by highly specific and diligent methods of observation. So there's a lot that he writes in *An Area of Darkness* which looked pessimistic in the 1960s, but turned out to be acute thirty years, forty years, fifty years later.

And I think that in his subsequent work, *India, a Wounded Civilisation*, you get something a little bit similar. This is now in the 1970s, around the time of the Emergency, and then again in the early 1990s in his book, *India, A Million Mutinies Now*, when extraordinarily he saw the social upsurge of different subaltern parties, parties of people disadvantaged by reason of caste or religion or region or culture. He identified, for example, the rise of the Shiv Sena and what subsequently turned into, you know, via the Jan Sangh, into the BJP. So that upsurge of a million mutinies was something that he was able to spot at a time when many writers, most journalists, had a different take on India. Anyway, so this is a roundabout way of saying that I don't think I was influenced by Naipaul's writing on India particularly, in terms of my own perception, but I was aware of the diligence with which he observed people and situations and used what he was hearing to try to construct a story about what was happening and what was likely to take place going forward. So... I think I perhaps emulated that to an extent in *India, a Portrait*, but my approach to India, my social view of India, the political take on India, were not particularly similar. O.K....So I started with your Naipaul question... and the other half of the question was....?

BF: How have your experiences in India shaped your life? And would you say that your immediate intimate experience of India makes you a very different writer to -

PF: - to people who come and go?

BF: Yes.

PF: I don't know. That's actually a very difficult question for me to answer because my first writings on India were in a notebook in 1986, when I was a student at Edinburgh University. I read those again a few years ago. I was thinking, 'There's got to be some interesting insight here'. There was nothing. They were just, you know, the typical responses of a nineteen-year old who comes to India for the first time. You know, "The heat, the dust, the smells, the people and the colours." I mean, I'm slightly exaggerating but I didn't feel there was anything particularly important about what I'd noticed at that time. The next kind of writing I did about India was more concerned with late nineteenth and early twentieth century, or mid twentieth century political history, so quite a lot of that was based on things that I was reading or archival interviews I was doing with people in India. I wasn't really writing about myself at that time at all. I then moved on to, if you like, a third stage, when I did *India, a Portrait*, where, by that time I'd been in and out of India for a long time - so I was very familiar with some regions of the country. And I tried to use that knowledge in order to work out who would be interesting to talk to and, therefore, what to write about. But again, in that context, I didn't really put myself into the narrative, unless it was necessary. So I might describe sitting in a club in Bombay, having a conversation with a promoter of Hindu nationalism, but I would only include myself in the text really in order to elucidate what the other person was talking about. So I think this is a roundabout way of saying that, "Of course, like anybody, my writing is informed by my own experience and biases," but normally that's been kept behind the scenes. It hasn't directly impacted what I have written.

BF: Your book, *India, a Portrait* looks at India in more recent times. The vibrancy of the teeming

nation is caught here through your many meetings with diverse people. Would you say that your views on India have been influenced by living here? Seen from your vantage point of living at the heart of the nation, as it were? Would you be happy to reflect on your insider/outsider status as a writer?

PF: So I think that my responses to India have altered according to how well I knew it or how well I knew a particular place. So really, up until about 2014, most of what I wrote about India was based on comparatively short periods of time that I spent in the country. Sometimes I might come for two or three weeks to write a particular thing, or to research a particular thing, and other times I might come for two or three months, again to research or write a particular story. But it was only in 2014 that I moved to New Delhi and I don't know whether by then the insider/outsider thing was relevant. I suppose it is to an extent. But I haven't written about India substantially since moving here.

I mean, let's say for example in India, a Portrait, where I did a study of hereditary politicians, the way that, particularly the younger generation of M.P.s. – a lot of them were the son or the daughter or the niece or the nephew of another significant politician – and I guess the reason why I became interested in that and the reason why I did research to establish how every M.P. in the Lok Sabha in 2009 had got into politics and got into Parliament was because I could see this happening from the inside. I had met the people. My aim was to investigate whether they got to Parliament through making a lot of money, or had they got there through an ideological party, where they'd risen up from the ranks, or had they got there because their mummy or daddy gave them a ticket to fight an election that they were bound to win? And that study probably, more than anything in India, a Portrait, was the thing that caught public attention, because people couldn't believe, particularly for the younger generation of M.P.s. – M.P.s. under the age of about forty-five – what a huge proportion of them were from these political families. But that process of research, that detailed research project, was, I guess, an example of where an insider status had made me realise that the phenomenon was changing politics, particularly at the centre here in New Delhi, but nobody had really got across it and written about it in that kind of detail. Whereas the outsider element of that perception was that, because I came from a different country, and I came from outside the society, I didn't assume it was normal; because I'm a great believer in the idea that anybody within any society, whether you're living in a prosperous and stable country or whether you're in a country that is beset by civil war, whether you're in a functional family or a severely damaged and dysfunctional family, whatever situation you're in, most people will normalise it. They think, "Well, that's just how it is. That's what life is like. That's what you have to deal with." Therefore, the ability to withdraw and look from outside at a situation, is a particular skill that writers or journalists need to develop. Political scientists need to develop it too, in order to try to get some objectivity and some distance and say, "Well, what is actually happening here? What can be deduced from the information that's coming to me... the evidence that's coming to me?" In a way that you can't do if you're completely inside that society. And you usually can't do if you're completely outside it either. This is something I have always felt, even when I was growing up in Wiltshire as a child: I felt in some sense outside the society, and looked in at it from the outside. But, equally, if you approach a book saying, "Well, I'm going to come in to a certain place, a certain city, a home, a society, and as an outsider, have all sorts of exciting perceptions," – well then unless you understand the functioning of that culture from the inside, you're going to miss the point of everything. I think this is particularly true of India. There has been a lot of journalism written about India in foreign newspapers which comes from an intelligent, well-trained, reporter turning up and spending two years living in New Delhi, circulating within a particular social world, partly ex-pat, partly Think Tank, maybe with English-speaking Indian journalists who have been to college in the US or UK. And the kind of journalism, or kind of writing, the books that are generated by that sort of

encounter are perfectly competent, but they often don't get to the underlying story, the underlying historical context of why things are happening in a particular way. So I think that, if you're trying to write analytically and descriptively, you can't be, in most cases, too much of an insider or too much of an outsider. And there are times when that's been beneficial to the work I've done.

BF: Would you say that through the decades that you have lived in India, but been back and forth, your views have been influenced, shaped by a change in India? Though much remains traditional and recognisable in India it has changed a lot in recent years. Do you recognise it as the country you chose to live in? Or do you feel it has changed beyond your expectations? Have these changes altered or affected your own writing and your perspective on India?

PF: Well, that's difficult to answer because, you know, so much of India is continuous. You know, as V.S. Naipaul famously quoted R. K. Narayan saying to him, "India will go on." I always thought that's a great quote from Narayan, "India will go on". Whatever happens, "India will go on." So you do get a degree of continuity or inertia within India, both in rural and urban and semi-urban settings, which is pretty nearly unmatched anywhere else in the world. I mean, imagine if you went to Egypt, for example, and found that the religion and the culture of the Pharaohs was still in place, in terms of present-day worship? It's kind of unimaginable... and yet in India, and I've noticed this particularly in the south, and there's a case to be made that a comparative absence of invasions in the far south of India can explain this, but there are different places where you can go in India and identify traditions and social practices, normally around the everyday context or religion as it is practised at, let's say, the household level, which have identifiable connections to things that were happening hundreds or even thousands of years ago. So, the element of continuity you get within religious cultures in India, the elements of continuity around caste, the linguistic continuity, the elements of connection you get around language... that is something that has not changed significantly as a result of the very recent social impact of economic change. So, the elements of continuity are there and, to that extent, you can argue that there is an unchanging element to India. But, the thing that I became extremely interested in in the early 2000s was the effect of... a high compound growth rate over the course of ten years and the impact that was having, not necessarily on the whole of India but on certain privileged social segments. So if you have a seven or eight per cent annual rise in per capita G.D.P. and you compound it over a decade, you have something close to a doubling in the size of the economy. It has a massive effect on how people live. So that element of change is something that I found very intriguing in the late 1990s, early 2000s, and it's something that I tried to write about in various different ways. I think what interested me most was where you could see it being played out on aspects of culture that were fairly traditional, and particularly fairly patriarchal. So, I have a chapter in India, a Portrait about the way that when the software industry of the early 2000s led to a lot of people who were quite young getting comparatively high-paying jobs, you'd have a situation where within a household, the daughter-in-law in her mid-twenties was suddenly earning three times as much as the father of the household. What right then does the father or the mother-in-law to say, "You have to stay at home and cook meals"? There's this economic power or financial power, that people of the younger generation had and it interested me, particularly when it was women, in how they could assert themselves within the family. And you see that playing out in Delhi or in Ahmedabad where I spend a lot of the time now, because of starting the new School of Arts and Sciences at the University. You can see that playing out all the time: the idea of people who are part of a family structure which, in many ways, remains as it would have been in earlier generations, and yet there's a necessary adaptation around the economic opportunities that have come to people.

BF: You are working on a biography on Doris Lessing now.

PF: Yes.

BF: Do you see yourself going back to writing about India in a subsequent book? If so, do you have any idea of what it might be on? Or what it might be like?

PF: The reason I moved to India in 2014, to New Delhi, was because my wife, Meru Gokhale, was offered a job as Editor in Chief of Penguin Random House India, after the merger between the two publishing companies, Penguin and Random House. That meant that since 2014, I've been based in New Delhi. Now, the complication for me came about a year after moving here when I was approached by the literary estate of the novelist Doris Lessing, who is the only British woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, and they said would I be interested in writing her authorised biography. And... the strange thing about it was that, having moved to Delhi, for the first time in my life I am now writing a book that has no connection to India. Everything else I've written has had some connection to India. With Lessing there is no connection at all... apart from the fact that she had a boyfriend who was a psychiatrist who ended up living in Bangalore and starting an institution there. I mean, that's as close as it gets. So it's a little complicated in terms of how I'm working on the biography, but you know, what interests me about Lessing's life is the fact she was very much a product of large-scale global events of the twentieth century. You have her father's leg being blown off in World War I, you have her parents in 1924 going to the British Empire Exhibition in Wembley and thinking, "Oh, look, you can go and do farming in Southern Rhodesia." They actually looked at posters in the British Empire Exhibition of corn swaying in the breeze and it seemed like a romantic and prosperous place to go and work. So they ended up shifting to this white settler colony in Southern Rhodesia where they lived a very tough life. Doris left school at the age of thirteen. They were poor white farmers in a very structured, racially charged and oppressive society and out of that, probably inevitably as World War II came along, Doris Lessing began to imbibe ideas of nationalism, of Left politics, subsequently of Communism. And the kind of ideas that would in time be identified as feminism, and with her as a progenitor of some of those ideas, but... it was quite an instinctive process for her.

What you had was a girl in her late teens, early twenties, who was stifled by the white settler colony of Southern Rhodesia, and out of that she started to write, she started to become politically engaged. And then there's the larger story of her shifting to London and writing books that take on everything from colonialism, to postcolonialism to communism, to feminism and post-feminism, as well, of course, as an amazing set of novels and stories. So I guess I was intrigued by the idea of Lessing as somebody who, during the course of her long life – she lived into her nineties – was able to tell a much bigger, global story. So that's what I'm working on at the moment, primarily using her personal archives to tell the story.

BF: But, also, I think your own interest in subaltern history and post-colonialism perhaps makes you identify with the subject as something you would like to work on?

PF: Exactly, because I'm a believer in the idea that biography is a very important form of history, and famously the Regius Professor of History at Cambridge, G.R. Elton, Geoffrey Elton, said in a lecture once, "You can write biography if you want to, but you shouldn't pretend that in doing so you're writing history." He said biography was concerned with trifling things like emotions and household concerns. Well, to me that is history and it needs to be written and it needs to be captured; and actually the kind of swerve within the study of history in the Academy towards the idea that the history of feeling, of sensibility, of emotion, is something that we should attempt to study is

important. Good biography is a method by which that history can be achieved. So, you know, I think again and again, when you're studying any Social Science or Humanities subject and people are seeking to make it appear very objective and distant, when they're seeking to call it a science even though it's highly subjective in some cases, what you come back to is the individual, and how that individual is impacted by a set of circumstances. So, what interests me is the larger social, cultural, economic and political forces that act on an individual and combine with their own personal instincts or tendencies so as to generate a life story that can be described over the course of a book. I like the marriage of the public and the private realm in historical biography.

BF: I think I have a little question - do you see yourself coming back to write about India?

PF: Oh, to write about India again?

BF: Yes, and also do you have any idea what it might be?

PF: Yes, so the only thing I've written on India in the last few years has been biographical sketches or interviews with leading politicians. And in most cases, I've taken people who were, for one reason or another, of interest to me. So it could be Sharad Pawar, it could be someone like Asaduddin Owaisi in Hyderabad or Nitish Kumar in Bihar. Arvind Kejriwal, Arun Jaitley, a very interesting figure and Amit Shah, of course. You know, spending a Saturday evening with Amit Shah, recording his thoughts on the state of India and its future was certainly a rare and disturbing opportunity. So, those kinds of detailed interviews leading to biographical sketches of politicians who intrigue me, is the only thing on India I've written, really, in recent years. But, as to the future... I don't think there's anything that I want to write currently at book length. I've got the biography of Doris Lessing, where I'm coming towards the end of the research stage. Fairly soon I'll be starting the writing of that book. I've got a larger project on Empire that I will probably write after that. What interests me is the changeover point between when nationalist leaders take power, in different parts of the British Empire in particular, and then what happens in the immediate postcolonial period. So I'm thinking of people like Nehru, or like Sukarno, or Nasser or Kwame Nkrumah, and the way that you have an idealistic nationalist politics, which normally is informed by Socialism or in some cases by Communism, and then you have the difficulties and realities of what happens immediately after Independence. And how that plays out in different countries.

BF: I can see Fanon coming in...

PF: The Fanon story. Exactly. In fact, there's interesting work on Fanon that's been done in recent years by Jean Khalifa. So, that changeover process I find interesting... and the way that idealism actually plays out, particularly in a society that in some cases – this is not so true of India as it is of others – but particularly in societies where the degree of colonial control remains largely in place. You see that to an extent, in the West Indies. You see it in parts of West Africa, where big companies or, in some cases, legacy institutions, which are still run by white settlers, means that your ability as a leader to exercise power within a nominally independent country, is significantly curtailed. So I have ideas of a book about that process of internal conflict. But, at some point, I'm sure, you know, yeah, the day is young, and at some point I'm sure that I will write about India again.

BF: Also, this particular book on empire, you know, just before Independence and straight after will include India in a big way.

PF: To an extent, because of Nehru's story.

BF: So, this is the final question...

PF: Okay.

BF: Would you be happy to give an account of what living and writing in India means to you, as an author? After all the books you have written so far?

PF: Living and writing in India is something that has informed some of the books that I've done, but in most cases I've been coming back and forth between India and the U.K. So, it's informed what I've learnt in India but it's not necessarily contained directly in the writing. It's also affected the other thing that I'm doing which is not connected to writing, being the inaugural Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Ahmedabad University. A lot of my time is spent on building future programmes that we're going to teach, in hiring faculty, in setting up systems of effective administration within the school, in dealing with practicalities like the building itself and interacting with architects and interior designers. So, you know, that's very much a practical engagement but... I'm not sure that it would necessarily be demonstrated on the page in the way that earlier engagements with India have been.

BF: You were head-hunted for this job.

PF: I was.

BF: So, how did it come to you and how did you feel about it when you got it? And what do you see as your vision and contribution because this will be a kind of concrete contribution to Indian education.

PF: It will. It will. What interested me about Ahmedabad University when I visited for the first time, at the beginning of 2017 was the fact that it was quite idealistic, in that they had a vision of building an institution where you could have inter-disciplinary learning and you could have an emphasis on the liberal arts. Where you could have people coming in to do an Engineering degree and taking a course in Sanskrit. Where you could have people coming in in order to do a History degree and, on the side, as part of their degree, doing an elective in Data Science. That idea of attempting to look at some of the major challenges facing the modern world through inter-disciplinarity was extremely attractive to me as an idea and I was impressed by the people who were setting up the university and the kind of conceptual ambition they had. The other thing I liked about it was the fact that they had a designated two hundred and one-acre campus in the middle of Ahmedabad, in the city, and a significant endowment from the Ahmedabad Education Society which was set up in the 1930s by people like Sardar Patel, Ganesh Mavalankar, Kasturbhai Lalbhai, as part of the Freedom Movement. What they did when they were persuading people to give land to them in the 1930s was to say, "We need a resource for when India is independent so we can build a good education system." That institution, the Ahmedabad Education Society, is still intact. It's very well funded and they want to create a world-class university in the west of India.

So it was a combination of the different factors that made me think, 'Well, this is something that I want to be part of,' because it seemed to be a really significant chance or opportunity to create an institution that subscribed to the principles of the liberal arts, and of inter-disciplinarity, of academic

freedom, but did so in a way that was not only theoretical. I liked the idea of helping to build a new academic institution. It wasn't people saying, "We've got a great idea for a new university. Can somebody please give us some money?" Instead, it was saying, "Well, you've got the vision and we've got the capital and, therefore, we have the chance to execute it." So that was what made me want to join Ahmedabad University. I also quite liked the fact that an additional part of the job was being Professor for the Public Understanding of the Humanities. In other words, being able to say to people who come out of an education system, particularly in the last generation, and who have been told, "If you're clever you must do Engineering or Management." Instead, to say, "Well, if you're clever you can do Engineering and Management and Finance, but you should also learn how to think about what it means to be human. Why is it that the study of history, languages, literature, of the arts in their varied form, can help to make you a better and more educated person?"

BF: The liberal arts.

PF: The liberal arts. And so it was that combination that brought me through the door, you know.

BF: So you are looking forward to actually shaping a whole education system and can we think of, for example, Tagore, who always believed in inter-disciplinarity?

PF: He did. He absolutely did and practised it -

BF: - and practised it. So do you see that kind of ethos, the inter-disciplinarity, the cross-disciplinarity, the inclusion of the arts as part of learning, the imperative status of history, for a complete education...

PF: I do. And you know, Tagore is a great example, because of the fact that he was a great poet, a great writer, a great public speaker. He also wrote interestingly on a larger idea of politics than Asian politics in his non-fiction writing. On top of that, there were the songs, his painting and his visual art, which was of a very high standard. So, he's a sort of inter-disciplinary hero. But the larger point about this is that it's only really in recent years, in let's say the last twenty or thirty years, that you've had a tendency in Academia to fall into micro-disciplines, where you've had a tendency to disaggregate areas of intellectual study, in order to be more precise and narrow. Most academic achievements of earlier times depended on a degree of broadness of knowledge, which has fallen out of fashion and out of favour.

BF: Especially... as far back as Greek times when they was multi-disciplinarity in each philosopher.

PF: Yes, but what I mean is that you can go back to classical antiquity to find it, but you can, you know also find it in the nineteenth century, whether it's in India or Britain or anywhere else. But you know, what to me is interesting is the way that you will, if you look back at the history of Indian higher education in Indian universities in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, you would find people having published a paper on some aspect of the study of Prakrit and then you would look at their bio and that person would be a Maths Professor! What we have at the moment is a situation where everybody is expected to exist in their micro-discipline. I prefer to break boundaries.

BF: - and the rigidity -

PF: - and the rigidity of it. So, I think that, you know, if we're to solve the huge challenges that are being thrown at us in the twenty-first century, whether it's climate change or the effects of big data and algorithms, over-population, robotics or machine learning, the social changes. You know, none of those challenges can be addressed through a single discipline.

BF: Anyway, we look forward to seeing what you construct at Ahmedabad. I hope that it becomes an example to other institutions.

PF: Thank you.

Bashabi Fraser with Patrick French

Never Look Away

The Edinburgh International Book Festival (EIBF) is one of the major Festivals of the Edinburgh Festivals, bringing crowds from home and abroad to Scotland's capital every August. It is held in Charlotte Square and over two weeks it is abuzz with book lovers, authors, and journalists - people who still read and write books and are eager to listen to and read old favourites and discover new writers. Entrance to its green space, its bookshops and cafes is free. There is the Authors Yurt and the Press Tent where authors, interviewers and journalists can meet and discuss/plan their event, greet/meet and be replenished by free drinks and snacks throughout the Festival. There is an ice cream stall which is hugely popular when the Scottish sun is warm and benevolent and this year there were extra kiosks offering hot and cold beverages, which eased the queues a bit in the main cafes. The democratic nature of the EIBF is something I can vouch for as most of my books have been launched there through the years and I have been impressed by the egalitarian nature of the 'value' attached to writers. The fee for big names and not such big names, for new authors and established ones – is the same. And all writers are treated with dignity.

There were a few more firsts this time at the EIBF, as the Children's Bookshop was subsumed by the main bookshop, which had grown in dimension, but mercifully, hadn't given up its café. From 2017, the EIBF spilt out onto George Street, which runs at a right angle to the main entrance to the EIBF and has two venues as well as a Bookshop dedicated to Scottish Publications and Gaelic Books. Another novelty was an 'Imagination Tent' for children's literature in Charlotte Square which took children on lively journeys through creative workshops with authors and artists. In fact, the EIBF is very popular with wee ones who come with their parents and grandparents, to meet their favourite authors and listen to stories with starry eyes and are allowed to dream in spite of a world that seems to be falling apart around us.

Every year, Amnesty International organises readings from writers in prison and those who cannot/are forbidden to travel and from people who are incarcerated by occupying forces or isolated by War. Visiting writers volunteer to read the work of writers in prison, to ensure that their voices are heard. These events are free and well attended. In fact, I too have had the privilege of reading from the work of absent writers for the Imprisoned Writers Series. The EIBF makes one feel that there is a steady flame of hope burning as there are still people who have not turned away from or forgotten writers who have been arrested/imprisoned and/or sentenced.

This year, the overarching theme was 'We Need New Stories' as man's basic instinct – to listen to stories - has existed through time and this insatiable thirst for more stories and 'new stories' has been tapped by the 2019 EIBF in a raft of great names, yes, but also new names and fresh stories. As the world around us changes and we face multiple crises which affect human populations fleeing, surviving, challenging and demanding their space, Festivals like the EIBF give a platform to some of these marginalised voices to present their stories/ their ideas.

But it is also a season to which we look forward to see what pleasant surprises there are for us when we get the Festival brochure. This time it came in two international names who hail from the sub-continent – that of Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie, both of whom have a huge international following and have earned a certain notoriety for different reasons, both great writers who may anger a section of people today, but will always be considered amongst the greatest of the great who ever wielded a pen as a weapon. They appeared in the largest tent, which was sponsored this year by The

New York Times where the great and the good amongst writers are interviewed and whom the audiences have the opportunity to pose questions to towards the end of each session. So this year, the gigantic tent hosted events for authors like Simon Armitage, Britain's much admired Poet Laureate and Mary Robinson, Ireland's seventh President and a leading flag bearer for the preservation of our green planet. And there were the interviews of Arundhati Roy by Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon and of Salman Rushdie by the renowned BBC journalist, James Naughtie. All these events were sold out.

Arundhati Roy and Nicola Sturgeon's event was on the evening of 19 August to discuss Roy's compilation of essays which she has been writing for the past 20 years, in a volume with the ironic title, *My Seditious Heart* (Penguin Books, 2019) to a rapt audience. The title reflects the chilling inclusion of her name on the list of 'Anti-Nationals' in India today, which in spite of being a democracy, still has this colonial law operative under Section 124-A and the Indian Penal Code and has been retained by succeeding governments for 72 years in independent India and is now being implemented with renewed vigour.

Nicola Sturgeon spoke about Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize winning novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997) which brought her fame and stardom as a writer and Roy, with her characteristic acerbic wit, described the ire of many who judged her for her success as she entered into her activist role speaking for the marginalised, upholding human rights and yes, she said with dark humour, she was 'the hooker who got the Booker'. Sturgeon mentioned with humour, that people have said that Roy has written her second 'book', *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017, her second novel) twenty years after her first book, and pointed out that she had really never stopped writing as her political essays poured out in these interim years. Asked about the title of her recent essay collection, Roy spoke about her 'heart' being 'shattered' several times by what has been happening in the name of 'development' in her country, but she stressed that she was okay with having a 'shattered heart', as it was right to be hurt by injustice and pain meted out to whole populations along river valleys faced with displacement and dispossession by the building of mega and medium sized dams on the Narmada, by forest folk and indigenous farmers whose habitat and livelihood was being taken away from them, the danger of possessing the nuclear bomb and the continuing military presence in Kashmir. Roy donated her Booker Prize money (\$30,000) and the royalty from the book to human rights causes – to suffering humanity in her country. Her deep humanism shone through her dialogue with Nicola Sturgeon and right through question time. The First Minister noted how Roy's descriptions of the people she depicted – both fictional and factual - showed her socio-economic awareness of the times and the political implications of continuing divisions in an unequal society. The fact that Roy had the statistics and evidenced her writing through meticulous research was acknowledged and appreciated by Nicola Sturgeon, who has been an avid reader of her work and had reread her books before the interview.

When the current situation in Kashmir was brought up as its state leaders have been placed under house arrest and it has remained under curfew, been plunged into darkness, and from which all communication has been cut off – telephone, the internet, newspapers, TV and radio news since the revocation of Article 370, 'for their own good' and the 'development' of Kashmir in order to make it an integral part of India, Arundhati Roy sounded sad but unsurprised. When questioned about what she thought would 'happen' now, Roy said that as history has proved, fascism does have its death, but the question remains, 'at what cost?' The audience was silent, filled with foreboding.

In her 'Foreword' to *My Seditious Heart* Arundhati Roy says that through her years of investigative journalism, activism and writing, she has 'learned never to lazily conflate countries, their government policies, and the people who live in them'. She has 'learned to think from first principles – ones that predate the existence of the nation-state.' Her love of truth, her compassion and integrity are evident in words she read from her first essay in the book, entitled, 'The End of Imagination'. Words she wrote on a paper napkin for her friend when asked about dreams worth having. These words are foregrounded in italics in her book, about what matters in life, 'To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away (emphasis mine). And never, never to forget.'

There is beauty in the very use of language which upholds some basic human values which writers should never lose sight of. And language is something that Salman Rushdie too loves and uses with convincing power. In his writing, he has shown a respect for the strength of human endurance and the interdependence that has marked the socio-economic fabric of India and her diverse communities. His novels, like Roy's, have shown how a nation can dream through magical imaginings, a magic realism that softens the edges of a harsh reality they depict of explosive divisiveness.

One last question posed to Nicola Sturgeon was how she was able to remain an informed and sensible statesman who was astaunch feminist and dedicated to social inclusion and social justice as a nation's political leader. The question initially threw one who is seldom lost for words. But she bounced back in her characteristic fashion by saying, 'by reading many good books like those of Arundhati Roy' – a message that perhaps shows how well-read politicians can be good humanist statesmen.

At the EIBF on the evening of 26 August, Salman Rushdie discussed his recent novel with James Naughtie, which is a modern version of Cervantes' classic, *Don Quixote* (1605 and 1615), transformed to *Quichotte* (Jonathan Cape, 2019), which, as Rushdie has pointed out in his Note on its pronunciation, is equivalent to 'key-shot' – very close to how Cervantes himself would have pronounced it in his time with an 'ay' at the end – 'key-SHO-tay'. As in every work of Rushdie's fiction, his chief protagonist in this novel hails from the sub-continent, but this time, an Indian American (not, as Naughtie clarified for the audience – an American Indian, i.e., an indigenous American). Rushdie's fascination with the play of meaning in names was evident in the naming of his central character – Smile. 'Mr Ismail Smile' the Americanised version of Ismail. Like Roy, Rushdie foregrounds this information in italics. Rushdie described his novel as profoundly 'funny'. The novel, like all Rushdie's fictional work, is very much rooted in the time and context, in present day America, where Rushdie has lived since 2000. Ismail's 'near-total preoccupation with the material world' is through the flat screen, and he spends his time watching TV, mainly women in all sorts of shows, and falls in love with a TV personality, 'the beautiful, witty and adored Miss Salma R.' and his quest begins to find the object of his unfaltering passion, travelling across America with his imaginary son, Sancho. It is a satire on an America with an implausible man as President, who, Rushdie says, he was determined should not be his novel, so he manages to leave a face he 'hates' and his gestures which he detests more, out of his novel, while contemporary America remains the recognizable backdrop to Smile/Ismail's adventures. Rushdie is no political analyst, but he ventured that America would see a Democrat in the White House, its first Woman President. But was America ready to vote in a woman was a question he couldn't have an absolute answer for.

His deeply humane attitude was apparent throughout the interview as was his humour, and the gloom that had clouded Roy's parting words, was lifted through Rushdie's infectious sense of hope. And one wonders if that is because of his miraculous survival, for when Naughtie mentioned the death threat announced by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran in 1989, Rushdie pointed out, 'well, since then, one of us has died.' And he has lived to tell the truth with compassion and integrity that responsible writing demands. The question remains, how long will writers, who are determined to never look away in repressive regimes, live and remain free to tell the 'truth'? One solace remains, their powerful words in their books will be their legacy in years to come.

Bashabi Fraser
From the Edinburgh International Book Festival, 2019.

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Section II: Book Reviews

Aesthetics, Politics, Pedagogy and Tagore: A Transcultural Philosophy of Education by Ranjan Ghosh

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 214pp, £72/£63.20, hardback/ebook

Reviewer: Anindya Raychaudhuri

Ranjan Ghosh's book *Aesthetics, Politics, Pedagogy and Tagore* is significant and welcome new addition to the scholarship of Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of education. The book comprises of three chapters – the first, and the shortest focuses on Tagore's conception of itihasa or history, the second and by far the longest chapter is dedicated to analyzing Tagore's theories of non-hierarchical pedagogy and the final chapter provides a political framework for understanding Tagore's ideas of the pedagogies of the aesthetic. Ghosh's analysis of Tagore's ideas is framed using a transcultural approach – indeed this book represents the third of a trilogy that he has described as part of his 'trans-(in)fusion project' – which in the case of this book manifests itself in the construction of Tagore as a pioneer of pluralistic, non-hierarchical and therefore consciously politicised education. Ghosh's analysis is acute, his argument is convincing, and this book represents an important contribution to the study of Tagore's ideas, his role as a builder of institutions, and his place in the world, in the context of a wide variety of other thinkers, philosophers and educators.

In the first chapter, Ghosh forcefully demonstrates the richness of Tagore's notion of itihasa as a pluralist, non-linear and non-teleological challenge to Eurocentric hegemonic conceptions of History. Ghosh sets up a fascinating conversation between Tagore and Walter Benjamin, comparing their views of history. Ghosh argues that the role played by history in Tagore's educational model 'unconceals a latent history of the everyday and unhinges the banality of the habits of historical understanding' (p. 11) which in turn calls for 'a different aesthetics and politics of engagement with education'. (p. 15) Tagore's model of itihasa is fundamentally trans-disciplinary and transcultural – he 'always sought to incorporate different strains of ideas, hopes and pains of people from different races, cultures and religions.' (p. 18) History is much more than empirical or intellectual knowledge of the past – it incorporates the spoken word, entertainment, literature, music – what Ghosh in an elegant turn of phrase conceptualizes as a song 'that is best experienced through multiple inputs which expand on each other dialogically'. (p. 20)

Rather like a musical motif that keeps reappearing, this image of the song returns in the second, longest chapter that focuses more clearly on Tagore's philosophy of education. Ghosh quotes from Willie Pearson's memories of teaching in Santiniketan, when one of his students drew his attention to birdsong that was audible from the tree under which the class had assembled. Ghosh uses this birdsong as metaphor: 'What did the class learn from the bird's song? How could learning go beyond formal teaching?' (p. 46) Ghosh reads Tagore's pedagogy as an attempt to construct an educational relationship within which 'teacher, the taught and nature were caught in non-hierarchical gestaltic games of 'mutual domination' and 'interchangeable supremacy' involving imagination, empathy and tolerance'. (p. 45) Continuing his argument from the first chapter, Ghosh sets up this non-hierarchical pluralism as at the very centre of the Tagorean education project.

This long and particularly dense chapter is the heart of the book and of Ghosh's argument. Ghosh attempts to bring together an at times disorientating range of pedagogical thought in order to do justice to the richness of Tagore's approach to education. Perhaps inevitably, there were moments

that felt under-developed – Ghosh’s analysis that Tagore’s educational model represents a challenge to Cartesian thinking because the emphasis had been placed on ‘the child growing in soul and body through freedom and joy’ (p.45) is potentially really interesting, though perhaps not as fully developed as one might wish. More significantly, I was a little surprised that the title of this chapter – ‘No Schoolmaster: Aesthetic Education and Paedosophy’ sets up the potentially really fruitful idea of paedosophy – but the chapter does not really engage with what this concept might entail.

Across the second and third chapters, Ghosh usefully compares and contrasts Tagore’s ideas of education with that of Matthew Arnold, demonstrating how the differing context of British imperialism, among much else, accounts for differing approaches embodied by the two men. True to the infusive nature of Ghosh’s intellectual project, it is indeed in these moments of contextualized comparison that the book is at its strongest.

The final chapter brings to a close Ghosh’s argument about Tagore’s pedagogical philosophy by highlighting the counter-hegemonic nature of its politics. Through the book, Ghosh has defined Tagore’s thought as representing a counter-stream; here this argument is fully crystallized through the metaphor of traffic: This introduces a ‘cross-traffic’ in a non-impositional and non-hegemonic space that fights against ‘moral alienation’. Traffic of this nature creates opportunities ‘for revealing the different peoples to one another’ and engenders a ‘great federation of men’ which is not ‘a meeting of individuals, but of various human races’. (p. 138)

Ghosh then ultimately develops Tagore’s thinking as a challenge to the hegemony of binaries. The key term that runs through much of the book is Tagore’s idea of sambandha – a relationship of solidarity and sympathy across divides – body/soul, inside/outside, east/west, home/world and so on. Ghosh connects Tagore’s educational principles and practices to the attempt to develop this sambandha as an ethical, aesthetic, historical, intellectual, emotional, creative and, ultimately, political imperative.

Where the book is arguably less successful is in terms of structure. While one might have sympathy with Ghosh’s privileging of non-linearity and pluralism as an ethical and aesthetic force, I was still left with the sense that the book was more fragmentary than it needed to be. This was particularly noticeable in the lack of a clearly defined introduction or conclusion – which would, I believe, have added to the coherence of the book as a whole. The unequal length of the chapters adds to this problem, where in some senses the book ends up being centred in the longest middle chapter, with the first and the third acting as a kind of coda. The denseness of Ghosh’s writing, while understandable given the richness and range of his material, makes this impression of a lack of coherence even stronger. Ghosh defines Tagore’s vision of education ‘as an ensemble, an assemblage, whose power is in connecting with thoughts’ (p. 19) – he is completely correct, but I was left with the sense that the book would have been better served if it was less of an assemblage.

These relatively minor issues notwithstanding, the book remains an important and original contribution to Tagore’s pedagogical philosophy and will be of interests to scholars and practitioners everywhere.

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Rabindranath Tagore: A Concourse: Assays in Art, Literature and Translation
Debarati Bandhyopadhyay, Ed.

Kolkata: Business Economics Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2017), ISBN. 978-81-934026-5-8.

Reviewer: Usha Kishore

In the current literary climate of Tagore revivalism in Indian and Western academic institutions, the book of articles edited by Debarati Bandhyopadhyay entitled, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Concourse*, is a salient collection of essays that highlight a whole gamut of Tagore's work: Literature, Art and Translation. The reception and relevance of the overwhelming corpus of Tagore's work in the contemporary world has prompted a re-examination of his various oeuvres within current theoretical frameworks.

Debarati Bandhyopadhyay is Professor of English at Visva-Bharati University and is the Coordinator of the UGC DRS Special Assistance Programme (Phase II). She was a Post-Doctoral Fellow, during 2010-2011, at the Rabindranath Tagore Centre for Human Development Studies, a joint initiative of Calcutta University and the Institute of Developmental Studies Kolkata. She was an International Visiting Fellow at the University of Essex in 2017, where she delivered a public lecture on 'Tagore and Translation.' Her book *Melancholy Impressions: Rereading Thomas Hardy's Major Novels* was published in 2009. Her articles on Tagore have featured in international journals and as chapters in books like *Towards Tagore*. Bandhyopadhyay has also presented papers in London, Durham and various Indian Universities.

Bandhyopadhyay's current editorial venture is subtitled 'Assays in Art, Literature and Translation.' The term "assay" in the subtitle is a strikingly strange word. The editor is in agreement here in the Introduction. It is an archaic term for 'attempt.' In the contemporary contest, 'assay' has a range of meanings: evaluation, assessment and analysis. This critical anthology certainly analyses Tagore's multifarious oeuvres and also evaluates his writing in a contemporary context. It seeks to broaden the discourse on Tagore through a range of critical perspectives and a comprehensive outlook on all of Tagore's creative oeuvres: Poetry, Prose, Philosophy, Translation and Painting. This anthology concludes with Somadatta Mandal's translation of three satirical plays of Tagore. Like Tagore himself, this compilation of essays is multi-faceted and combines the creative and the critical.

Tagore has moved well beyond the shores of Bengal, ever since his Nobel prize in 1913, after which there has been a waxing and waning of international interest in the writer. Through temporal spaces, the works of Tagore have travelled and occupied interstitial spaces of culture, philosophy, literature, music and fine arts. Visva Bharati's ongoing research on Tagore has led to this anthology, wherein scholars enter into critical discourse on the life, times and creativity of the author.

Bandhyopadhyay's paper, 'Viewing the Margins' focuses on the earlier years of Tagore and a selection of letters written to his niece, published as *Chhinnapatra*, translated as *Glimpses of Bengal* and published in 1920. These are the poet's personal letters written in the 19th century and published in the early 20th century. Amidst the arcadian setting of rural Bengal, the poet becomes painfully aware of the suffering of the peasants and their vulnerability in the margins of the British Empire. Bandhyopadhyay traces the influence of these observations in Tagore's fictional work like *Gora* and

Home and the World. Bandhyopadhyay particularly links the composition of 'Cloud and Sun' to his Chhinnapatra and is of the opinion that the protagonist Sashibhushan's experiences of living in 'utmost sympathy with the villagers,' has an autobiographical element, wherein Tagore presents the panorama of rural life and the exploitation of the rural communities by the British Raj.

Bandhyopadhyay offers a theoretical perspective here of Ranajit Guha's 'small and silenced voice of history' and Spivak's subaltern. Here she attempts a successful but rather ambivalent parallel of Sashibhushan's voice of protest being silenced by his imprisonment. The essay opens to reader response and one is tempted to analyse the disintegrating village in 'Cloud and Sun' as a synecdoche of an enslaved India, falling apart due to the oppression of the British Raj.

Swati Ganguly's essay, 'Promises to a Poet: Gandhi, Tagore and the institution of Santiniketan' explores the Tagore-Gandhi relationship and their differences on the ideology of nationalism. The crux of the essay rests on Gandhi's and Tagore's shared dream of decolonisation and Santiniketan as a symbol of the preservation of this shared dream, whatever their conceptual differences on nationalism were. Ganguly concludes that Gandhi's support of Santiniketan, even after the passing of Tagore was to a certain extent imbibing Tagore's universalism: 'To be haunted by Santiniketan was to be haunted by nostalgia for a past that was not walled up by ideas that constructed the Nation.' The essay emphasises on Tagore's philosophy and does not dwell a great deal on Gandhian thought; however, Ganguly does highlight Gandhi's openness towards diverse, even contrapuntal perspectives.

Sukla Basu's (Sen) translations of Tagore's essays and speeches on Sriniketan appear book under the title, 'Sriniketan.' The selection of essays has translated excerpts from 'Palli Prakriti' (Vol XIV of Rabindra Rachanbali). Tagore's enchantment with rural Bengal and his disillusionment with the industrial revolution in British India and Europe reminds one of Wordsworth and the Romantic poets. Most of the essays run like sermons; for instance, the opening essay speaks of the rural urban divide. The essay opens with: 'The message of Spring is blowing through the forest borne by the south breeze.... The tress which has rasa – the flow of life – bursts into leaves and flowers in a response to the invitation from Spring... ' and ends with the disenchantment with the metropolis that creates endless 'shadows of sadness.' These essays bring to light Tagore's dream projects of Santiniketan and Sriniketan and the portray the poet as the idealistic creator of 'pioneering work structures' of two visionary educational ideals.

Ananya Dutta Gupta's essay, 'Tagore's Shey and its afterlife today: the Topicality of English Translation' is based on Aparna Chaudhuri's 2007 translation of Shey. The translation enunciates contemporary response to the work and its modern/postmodern context. The ambivalence of the Tagorean text and the ambience and ambiguity it lends to any interpretation is highlighted by Dutta Gupta. The prose- fantasia Shey translated as (He) was written to satiate Tagore's nine-year-old granddaughter's fascination or stories. The fantastically absurd and nonsensical world of Shey traverses children's literature and nonsense fiction into something more substantial in its characters: the eponymous protagonist's possession of the ganja addict's body, a bungling jackal, who wants to be human, tone deaf New Age poets and snuff sniffing scientists.

Shey is often read as an allegory, its characters interpreted as caricatures of myths, contemporary events and personae. Dutta Gupta attributes magical realism to the novel, in a postmodern context and questions various interpretations of the text. There is a comparison of the text to Tagore's doodles

6. Ranajit Guha, 'Subaltern Studies: projects for our Time and Their Convergence, in The Small Voice of History: Collected Essays, ed by Partha Chatterjee. (ranikhet, INida: Permanent Black, 2009). Pp. 346-360

and an attribution of intertextuality between Shey and the poem, 'The Crisis in Civilisation.' The essayist challenges Chaudhuri's reading of the text as a Kafkaesque hybrid. Dutta Gupta's rendering of Shey into English is discussed with the vernacular readings of the text and the essayist concludes that the self-irony of Tagore's "disturbing doodles" permeates this text too, leaving it open to many readings.

The many readings and interpretations of Tagore's work and art, which are varied in tone and nature, says the editor prompted the titular term, 'concourse.' As the title suggests the collection is a gathering or merging of the multifarious personality of Tagore and the heterogeneous interpretations of his works over the decades. This collection is more than a literary critique; it attempts to merge the various aspects of Tagore's oeuvre: essays, poetry, art work, prose, political writings, translation and nonsense prose under one umbrella, prompting the reader to gasp in bewilderment at the dynamic personality that was Rabindranath Tagore.

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Tagore: Beyond His Language

Delhi: Primus Books, 2017. 230 pp, hb, £44.95, ISBN 9 789384 082789. Imre Bangha, ed.,
Surfing Tagore

Reviewer: Mario Relich

The collection of essays in *Tagore: Beyond His Language* originated in a conference on 'Rabindranath Tagore Beyond Bengali Literature' organized, as the editor Imre Bangha tells us in his Preface, at Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, where he is Honorary Reader in Hindi, on 19-20 March 2012. He is also Associate Professor of Hindi at the University of Oxford. The book includes an engaging group photograph of the participants in front of their hotel. The photograph is worth mentioning because every contributor deals with Tagore's various writings, consisting of his poetry, novels and essays, as well as his art, on a very human level. Of course, plenty of academic expertise is displayed here, but in each case also warm appreciation of his cultural, and to some extent also political, significance at a global level.

The conference was held just before the 100th anniversary of the poet's Nobel Prize, the first one to be awarded to an Asian writer, and it was 'one of the many events reaping the fruits of academic activities encouraged by the celebrations of a towering figure claimed to be their own by both India and Bangladesh.' (p. vii) The conference also celebrated the centenary of the first English edition of *Gitanjali*, the main poetry collection for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize.

The essays are divided up into four areas of exploration: *Tagore's Texts and the Elemental*, and *Reaching Out to the World* making up the first two sections, with six contributions primarily about his writings; *Defining Forces of Tagore's Art*, two essays about the significance of his visual art; and *Tagore as Reference and Inspiration*, which includes four essays about the nature of his creativity and his personal impact on others, making for a total of twelve very varied and illuminating viewpoints. But probably the best way to read these essays is to avoid being overly systematic -- although the editor has helpfully mapped out the territory -- and read them at random as a way of what could be called 'surfing Tagore.' To put it another way, when setting out on a journey a good map is always useful, but in order to arrive at the destination it does not necessarily have to be religiously followed. Above all, the free play of imaginative empathy undoubtedly inspired the participants of the conference on Tagore, and it is in that spirit that the essays will be discussed.

To begin with *Gitanjali*, the collection of 'song offerings' for which Tagore is most famous in the West, William Radice, the foremost British Tagore scholar and translator, thoroughly discusses it. 'Healing the Self through Poetry and Drama: *Gitanjali*, *Dakghar* and *Raja*' argues that Tagore needed healing because his young wife Mrinalini, Renuka, a daughter aged 12, his father Debendrath, and his youngest son Samindranath all died within a few years. Radice shows how, as a consequence, the original Bengali version of 1910 was profoundly a work of bereavement, 'a means of stabilization and recovery after intense loss and grief', (p. 3) and that this mourning process was somewhat obscured in the 1912 English version, in which W.B. Yeats was perhaps too interfering. Radice's conclusion is that though Yeats claimed that *Gitanjali* can best be understood as 'the work of a supreme culture', it

should rather be considered as 'the utterance of a deeply reflective and suffering individual' (p. 20), which is why the essay also deals with plays, touching on life and death, written at roughly the same time, *Raja* (translated as *The King of the Dark Chamber*), and *Dakghar* (*The Post Office*).

Bangha's intention in his own essay, 'Charting Tagore's International Popularity between 1921 and 1961, is 'to detect trends in Tagore's reception not so much from national narratives as from the publication of books or translations.' (p. 70) He makes much use of statistical analysis to show how Tagore's reputation via translations of his books into English and other European languages fluctuated in the period discussed. One of his key observations is that 'Tagore's popularity in Central Europe (Germany, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, etc.), but also in English-speaking countries, came in three waves between which there were periods of amnesia.' (p. 71) The significance of his initial reception in the West, because of the Nobel Prize in 1913, according to Bangha, was that 'Tagore surprised European readership and heralded the end of Europe's cultural hegemony.' (p. 80) In the West, after the devastation of the First World War Tagore became 'a prophet with a spiritual message' of hope, but by the 1950s 'in the communist countries, he became an anti-imperialist thinker with a progressive social message.' (p. 80) Bangha concludes that the 'fluctuations in Tagore's fame show how vulnerable the reputation of the first best-selling modern Asian poet was to European fashion and ideologies.' (p. 80) To some extent, this appears to trouble him, and it certainly obscures Tagore's cultural and literary significance in India, but on the other hand no writer, however great, can completely avoid the forces of fashion and ideology, so if this is the case with Tagore, it does not necessarily detract from his work. Usefully complementing Bangha's essay, Liviu Bordas in 'Tagore in Romanian Culture: The First Three Decades (1913-1945)' records and analyzes Tagore's reception within one country. The article includes discussion of Tagore's visit to Romania in Nov. 1926, and his cultural dialogue with the great Romanian philosopher and historian of religion, Mircea Eliade. One of the article's valuable illustrations includes a photograph showing an overhead camera view of Tagore greeting the crowds in an open top royal car, 'returning from his meeting with King Ferdinand at the Royal Palace.' (p. 113)

Tagore also visited Soviet Russia (in 1930), and Sergei Serebriany, who has published several papers on Tagore in Russian and one in English, mentions in 'What Can We Learn from Reception History? Tagore – Russia – Dostoevsky' that Tagore is appreciated primarily as a poet in Russia. His essay is particularly good in showing how Dostoevsky's *The Devils* (sometimes translated as *The Possessed*) in all probability was an important influence on Tagore's novel about the Bengali Svadeshi movement, *The Home and the World*. About Tagore's Russian visit, which he wrote about in *Letters from Russia*, Serebriany points out that he 'compared the alleged achievements of the Bolshevik regime with India's plight under British rule, and strongly criticized the latter.' (p. 53)

Tagore's visit to Hungary in 1926 is mentioned by Geza Bethlenfalvy in 'Tagore and Hungarian Ladies'. Among other posts, he was Director of the Delhi Hungaria Cultural Centre in 1994-2000 and has written widely on religion and art in South Asia. His essay is mainly about the Hungarian painters Elizabeth Sass-Brunner and her daughter Elizabeth Brunner and how as artists they related to Tagore and his own endeavours as a visual artist. Their story is a remarkable one. Elizabeth Sass-Brunner had a strong mystical streak, which was reflected in her paintings of the Lake Ballaton area in Hungary. Both she and her daughter were sensitive to dreams and visions. On a visit to Italy, the daughter actually dreamed about 'a grey-bearded impressive man' who 'offered her an oil lamp'. Her mother promptly identified the man as Tagore himself, who had recently visited Hungary. They subsequently met him in India and collaborated on some of his artistic projects in the university he founded, Santiniketan. The daughter, Elizabeth Brunner, did some paintings of Tagore, including

'Tagore reading', 'Students leaving Santiniketan', 'Tagore teaching' and a portrait 'Tagore', all of which are illustrated. Bethlenfalvy concludes that the Brunners were not just 'a mere addition to the eccentrics who flocked to Tagore in the heyday of his fame', maintaining that 'their irascible spiritual and artistic quest' resulted in 'wonderful paintings presenting Indian life and inner experiences around Tagore.' (p. 213) Both artists are celebrated to this day in India and, of course, Hungary.

France Bhattacharya, translator of several Bengali novels into French and writer of numerous essays on Tagore's short stories, in her essay 'Tagore and Romain Rolland: Friends in Search of a Universal Humanism' testifies to Tagore's relationship with France, as well as the French writer, for universal humanism has been a feature of French intellectual life at least since Montaigne and certainly the French Revolution. Tagore and Rolland were close friends, and Bhattacharya quotes a revealing letter from the Bengali poet to the French novelist: 'There is in my nature a kind of civil war between the personality of the creative artist – to whom solitude is necessary – and that of the idealist who must find his accomplishment through works of a complex nature, requiring a vast collaboration with a great number of men.' (p. 36) But the essay also demonstrates that despite their intellectual affinity the 'story of Rolland and Tagore's friendship is an illustration of the limits of East-West understanding at a time of great upsurges in India and Europe.' (p. 44)

But as a visual artist, Tagore was much influenced by modern European art. Significantly, his very first public exhibition was in France, at the Galerie Pigalle on 2 May 1930, and Paris was the capital of modern art at the time. As Batthacharia informs us, it was organized 'in a very short period of time, thanks to the contacts and energy of Victoria Ocampo.' (p. 41) Ocampo was a well-known writer and socialite whom Tagore had met in Buenos Aires on a visit to Argentina. They became close friends, and she is mentioned in no less than three of the twelve essays. Essays by Ketaki Kushabi Dyson, Sushobhan Adhikary and Vijay Koshik also focus on Tagore's art.

Kushaki Dyson is, among other accomplishments, a poet and novelist, and has written four books directly relating to Tagore. Her essay, 'Tagore in Context', brilliantly discusses how his partial colour-blindness affected not only his art, but also his literary works. It was a condition that particularly impinged on how he perceived the colour red. For instance, she tells us that he had 'a definite phobia about blood, which he probably perceived as a near-black liquid, almost always connecting it with violence and aggression, and seldom with vitality, which is the more common association in Bengali usage.' (p. 144) She points out that he tended to paint dark scenes in which 'there is a lot of brown', and that 'it might well have been a dominant colour in his field of vision', adding that quite 'a number of his paintings are actually monochromatic, each simply working out tonal variations of one hue, avoiding colour contrasts.' (p. 149)

Adhikary on 'Tagore the Global Artist' expands on Kushabi Dyson's analysis and takes it further. Adhikary is an artist himself, as well as art historian and art restorer. His essay is well illustrated and shows how Tagore is very much a modern global artist. His eclectic range of influences, include German Expressionism, Native Canadian art from the Pacific Northwest, African masks, and art of the South Seas islanders. An illustrated woodcut of Emil Nolde's 'The Prophet' looks uncannily like it could be a portrait of Tagore himself.

Vijay Koshik, a renowned artist himself, argues in his essay on 'The Diffusion of Tagore's Art and Perceptions in India Beyond Bengal' that Tagore's art emerged from the deepest levels of his personality, and that for him it was a form of play. Here is how Tagore described the impetus for his artistic practice: 'First there is a hint of a line, then the line becomes a form. The more pronounced

the form becomes the clearer becomes the picture of my conception. The creation of form is a source of endless wonder.' (p. 190) This is very close to Paul Klee's famous description of drawing in terms of 'taking a line for a walk.' The 'hint of a line' was also sometimes developed into 'sophisticated calligraphy,' (p. 192) an important element of Tagore's art. Koshik's illustrations to his article includes striking examples of the poet's calligraphic art. Above all, according to Koshik, Tagore's art revealed him at his most liberated: 'Spontaneity was a key to Tagore's personality.' (p. 199)

Spontaneity was also key to his sartorial tastes. The art historian Alka Pande in her short, but richly informative, essay on 'Gurudev: The Sartorial Humanist', demonstrates that even in his way of dressing Tagore's colour preferences were similar to his painterly aesthetics: 'Tagore's own attire, beard and preference for beige and maroon falls within the definition of dandyism.' (p. 181) This observation could be taken a bit further, his understated dandyism, including beard, would certainly align him with today's hipsters. Pande is especially interesting, with photographs to match, on how Tagore has influenced the contemporary fashion designer Joy Mitra. One photograph is entitled 'Man and Muse'. It shows a young man with his legs crossed and sitting pensively, while his standing female 'muse', with her right arm angled at her hip, and her left hanging down her dress, looks at the reader quizzically. The caption identifies them sartorially: 'Lady in black printed anarkali dress, sap green scarf adding the required colour and the man in printed silk shirt.' (p. 188)

Tagore's treatment of Hindu mythology is discussed by Malashri Lal in her essay 'Rabindranath Tagore's 'Mahabharata: Episodic Incursions' and her conversation with Namita Gokhale, under the rubric 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Re-appropriation of Myth: Epic Sources and Creativity'. Lal has written widely on women and families in India and is Dean of Academic Activities and Projects at the University of Delhi. She argues that Tagore is at his most interesting in his re-interpretation of mythic women characters. For instance, in the dance-drama Chitraganda, inspired by the Mahabharata, 'Tagore embroiders the story to make Chitra a dual character, the warrior, man-like person whom Arjuna rejects, and the luscious beauty with whom he falls madly in love.' (p. 25) Lal also discusses how the 'maternal versus lover paradigm appears fascinatingly in Rabindranath's reinvention of the Mahabharata.' (p. 22) But she wonders whether Tagore's liberal-minded view of women was more theoretical than present in his patriarchal private life: 'Did he find the possibility of transcending sexual barriers only in the realm of myth, epic and legend?' (p. 26).

Gokhale, a Founder-Director of the Jaipur Literary Festival, in her conversation with Lal, goes further: 'The metaphors and poetry make it amply clear that, while he could speak in a feminine voice, his mind was not privy to feminine sensibility.' (p. 177) She herself has made the Mahabharata and other mythic texts accessible to modern readers, notably in *The Puffin Mahabharata*, an illustrated version for young and first time readers, excerpts of which are included in Gokhale's conversation. But she nevertheless makes it clear that she finds much of value in Tagore's revisions of Hindu mythic stories. As a novelist, Gokhale in Lal's words, 'adapts mythology to contemporary contexts.' (p. 169)

The cover of this book is graced by an illustration of a glass-sculptured portrait of Tagore by Vijay Kowshik. It suggests Tagore's crystalline imagination, and the collection of essays itself demonstrates with great verve and critical acumen how deeply Tagore in all his creativity as poet, novelist, playwright and artist, was appreciated in the whole of Europe, Russia, Latin America, and of course India, not just in the UK.

Mario Relich, The Open University in Scotland

Section III: Creativity



Recalling Former Travels

Tom Pow

In 1967, I was seventeen and saving up for a copy of The Incredible String Band's 5,000 Spirits or The Layers of the Onion. I would ask to have it played for me in booths, as you could then, but the booth would fall silent after two tracks. Maybe it was the school uniform's fault. I worked that summer as an usher at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, where each night the stands would sway alarmingly to a brass band playing the St Louis Blues. But the work earned me the necessary seventeen shillings and sixpence, which my memory tells me the LP cost.

But 1967 was a cultural landmark, for me and for many other poets of my generation, for another reason; it was the publication date of Miroslav Holub's Selected Poems in the Penguin Modern European Poets series. Three shillings and sixpence. Or the price of two (illegal) pints. It was followed in 1968 by Zbigniew Herbert's Selected Poems (four shillings and sixpence) and by Vasko Popa's in 1969 (four shillings, or the new 20p). Three poets from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia respectively. There were many other European poets in the series – ones from the Europe we (thought we) knew: Appolinaire, Rilke and Enzenberger; Ungaretti and Quasimodo. It felt as if you could loop yourself through those beguiling vowels as with those of Akhmatova and Yevtushenko. Each year I cull my bookshelves, but I have never cast off one of my Penguin Modern European Poets; each one had once taken me elsewhere.

However, it is the first three titles I mentioned that have had the deepest and longest lasting effect on me, if not on my own writing. Penguin Modern Poets – a series featuring British and American poets was launched at roughly the same time. I bought several of these too and have them still, but I couldn't recall, without looking, which ones I have, apart from, natch, The Mersey Poets - at one point, I think, the highest selling poetry book ever. There are fine poets in the Modern Poets series – and it has been recently revived – but none took me over a border to another place; although Charles Tomlinson's work stayed with me. Nevertheless, the Italian poet and academic, Marco Fazzini, reminded me recently that the appetite in Eastern Europe for the Modern Poet series was just as keen. My enthusiasm for my triumvirate – and for the series from which they came – was the result of my age, the literary and political context within which I was reading them and the qualities the poems possessed. Reading Tomlinson's free-wheeling, American-accented poems in a repressive regime, poets of my age would be able, I imagine, to cite similar causes for their engagement.

I was of the generation – perhaps the tail end of the generation – for whom, in school certainly, poetry's most celebrated representative was Dylan Thomas. Poetry was generally about nature (or Nature), freshly minted imagery was 'genius' and the language was the heightened diction befitting poetry. We put our hands up and had a stab at what the poet 'might mean'. Though the poetry of Heaney and Hughes was more grounded in experiences we recognised, we were still in the (highly teachable) 'poetry zone'.

My Eastern Europeans wrote in a different way and about very different experiences. Their language was direct, their poems stripped to the bone, their forms attenuated, variable. Holub ends a poem titled 'Love':

Sweepings.
Dust.

Bitter
as the beginning of the world.

Believe me when I say
it was beautiful.

Herbert begins a love poem, 'Silk of a Soul':

Never
did I speak with her
either about love
or about death

only blind taste
and mute touch
used to run between us
when absorbed in ourselves
we lay close

This was a romanticism that was open to a young man – even though, or especially because, it was often fragile, bitter and doomed. Though it is a world in which Holub still recognises the imaginative richness of what happens in 'A Boy's Head' ('In it there is a space-ship/ and a project/ for doing away with piano lessons'), it is a world without security ('we give a helping hand/ to people/ to some people...' from 'A Helping Hand') or the assurances of 'home'. The house builder in 'Fairy Tale', for example, after building and furnishing his house:

...went off
lone as an arctic fox
through the cold
unending
rain
into the world.

For Herbert too, the world was unpredictable and fearful:

Our fear
does not wear a night shirt
does not have an owl's eyes
does not lift a casket lid
does not extinguish a candle...

our fear
is a scrap of paper
found in a pocket
'warn Wójcik
the place on Długa Street is hot'

(from 'Our Fear')

A character who stalked these poems who was unfamiliar to us was History or, in Holub's poem, 'The

Lesson', 'the engine of history' whose introduction is a prelude to 'the massacre/ of the innocents'. Unfamiliar, because in my first decades, history seemed a static affair – it was simply the way things were; the way the world, and particularly Europe was arranged. Yet here was History, as we have come to recognise it, though less so, as 'unpredictable and fearful' with a stuttering, vengeful engine. Vasko Popa, although in many ways the most playful of the three poets, with his animation of pebbles and bones, captured in his small 'parables' the brutality of the twentieth century – the brutality of European history:

Some bite off the others'
Arm or leg or whatever

Take it between their teeth
Run off as quick as they can
Bury it in the earth

(‘He’ from the sequence ‘Games’)

In *Poetry of the Committed Individual, A Stand Anthology of Poetry*, published by Penguin in 1973 – and given to me by my father when he feared a discernible lack of commitment in me – the editor Jon Silkin attempts to weld the poetry I have described to that of the poetry in the 'free West'. In the introduction, he writes:

‘By getting to understand something of perhaps very different cultures, it may help us not to preserve but to freely practise our own, and destroy that possible society of common market cliché and inter-state rule, with each government co-opting the other into fanatical repression of its ‘subjects’. The quicker and more thoroughly we learn, in however limited a way, something of what the sensuous powers and moral entrapments feel like in Iowa, Teesside, or Prague...the more insistently can our preparations be made for a continually vigorous and changing culture.’

There is such a passionate belief in the empathetic power of poetry here, it cannot but raise the question again: Where on earth was the cultural argument in the Brexit debate?

The Penguin Modern European Poets were my companions - it felt, my own discoveries – during my late teens. I never saw any of the poems in their original languages and recently, at a conversation between translators I chaired at StAnza (St Andrews Poetry Festival), each panel member said that the decision to have or not to have parallel the source material and the translation is a red line to them. Of course, I appreciate the point; but I also know that if these precious collections had been double the price, I can't say how many would have travelled with me, nor which discoveries would have remained closed to me. I should also say that these poems, whittled bare as they are, do not make the best models for a young poet. Though Jon Silkin may judge that the image is “too often confection fed to a gluttoned and pampered consumer,” a young poet needs to play in a field that offers a wide variety of sustenance: the line that is tempered by intense experience cannot be conjured without it.

That said, my travelling bible in those years when I worked to earn enough in the summer to hitch my way through Europe – drawing a cat's cradle through the years – was *Modern European Poetry – The Most Comprehensive Collection of Contemporary English Translations Ever Published In One Volume* (Seven editors! Bantam Classic, 1966). On the beach at Matala on Crete, about which Joni

Mitchell had once sung, as my girlfriend made her way through Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, I travelled through Europe, making fresh acquaintances. I can still be thrilled by these lines in 'Mathiós Pasćalis Among The Roses' by George Seferis:

Her aunt was a pitiful creature with protruding veins
she had many wrinkles about her ears and a moribund nose
but her words were full of prudence always.
One day I caught her touching Antigone's breasts
like a small child stealing an apple.

Many years later, I would travel through much of Europe again from Northern Spain to Russia, responding to the demographic issues of depopulation. In *Another World – Among Europe's Dying Villages* (Polygon, 2012) contains travel essays, short stories, poems and photographs. Its title comes from a line I read in the same bible – a line by Paul Eluard I have always loved: "There is another world – but it is in this one." However, I have just discovered there is no such line by Paul Eluard in the book; nor is there any Paul Eluard.

My next immersion was not so much geographical as psychological. I had lived in Spain and travelled through North Africa for a year. I returned to a relationship I found hard to resolve and hard to relinquish. When the relinquishing was decided for me, I was living in a house in the countryside mid-way between Dumfries and what had been the small village port of Glencaple, close to The River Nith and I was absorbed by the world of haiku and by early Chinese poetry.

tall grasses in spring
against the roots which bind them
wave their feathered heads

kissing in a field
where peewits lay dappled eggs
and cloud courting cloud!

dead wave of driftwood
I am fragile and alone:
the tiny white crab

the night sky glitters
like a broken engagement:
who courts autumn now?

For a while, I think I was as trapped by the inability of the haiku, as I practised it, to move forward, as much as I was beguiled by Wang Wei, Li Po and Tu Fu. No matter the season, it was possible to find melancholy along the river – in the cry of the geese passing overhead or in September's last bright red admiral butterfly. I spent much time contemplating Tu Mu's (803-52) series, 'Recalling Former Travels'. Borges once wrote of influences that he "included those [poets] I have read and whom I echo; then those I have never read but who are in me." Although it is the melancholic me that feels most drawn to the landscape conjured in these poems, I am also enchanted by Li Po, falling for the moon, and by the warmth and democratic inclinations of T'ang poet, Han-shan, who in one of his Cold Mountain poems (number 20) advises:

If someone would poke out the eyes of the hawks
We sparrows could dance wherever we please!

My immersion in these poets and an accompanying dalliance with meditation was not quite a pose, but nor could it ever be 'home'. And I was beginning to focus on poetry closer to hand, to develop a love that has not shifted over many years for poets who help us to see – Norman MacCaig, Seamus Heaney and Elizabeth Bishop. There was though one thread of exploration that links with travel, but that took a while to unfold. This is a passage from my book, *In The Place of Serpents – An Experience of Peru* (Canongate, 1992):

'When I was a student at St. Andrews, I used to go in every day to Henderson's bookshop, pull from the shelves *The Spider Hangs Too Far From The Ground* [by Peruvian poet, Antonio Cisneros] and read a few of the poems before I could afford the sixteen shillings it cost. His image on the back cover was dark-eyed, intense, very handsome. Below, it announced, 'Antonio Cisneros, born in Lima in 1942, is one of the most exciting young poets writing in Latin America today. His poems combine a deep involvement with Peru and its history with a fine control of language and structure. The result is an amazing freshness, intensity and vision.' It was as far as I can remember the first Latin American writing I had come across.

The book contained longer meditations ('Chronicles') set in London and Paris, but the ones that excited me were the short lyrics with all these mysterious, beautiful names: Paracas, Pachacamac, Atacama, Tupac Amaru, Ayacucho, Tarma. The poems themselves slipped down like good ceviche – fresh, tangy and memorable.'

Here is one of them:

I'm getting out
& going some 30 kilometres towards the coast
where one day I saw tall dark grass
reaching to the sea, & my only joy
will be that grass brushing my ears,
my only comfort those easy waters,
I'll just stretch out on the wet sand, shoeless,
close my eyes, & shut my heart
like the saltwater snails,
the hard red ones.

Kate Briggs writes in *This Little Art* (Fitzcarraldo, 2017) about, "...everyday, forgettable reading: the reading that passes us by, as William Gass puts it, like scenery seen from a train." Then there are the lines, the images, which lodge with you for reasons that seem to surpass logic; or to put it another way, that by-pass logic and go straight to the heart of the thing itself. I cannot read, or sing, Christina Rossetti's words, "Snow had fallen, snow on snow,/ Snow on snow," without submitting to the mystery of why they should affect me as they do; and I feel the same way about the definitive ending to Cisneros' poem: "like the saltwater snails,/ the hard red ones." I am sure I have found myself attempting its echo in my own work.

I met Antonio in Lima twenty years after reading that poem for the first time – and now thirty more years have passed. I love it as a young man's poem, shirtless, shoeless, at ease, as Camus was in his

early essays about his Algerian youth. The man I met was forty-six and troubled by his country's past and its present: Sendero Luminoso was terrorising the countryside, while presidential hopeful Mario Vargas Llosa was proposing a Thatcherite solution to Peru's woes.

“There's a historical debt to pay,” [Antonio] said with bitterness. “We're not the guilty ones, but we're being asked to pay. I just wish it wasn't happening now, in my time, with my son, with my daughters. Why not years ago or in three centuries time?”

I had arrived in Lima after spending a month with Alastair Reid and his partner Leslie Clark at their modest domicile at Samaná in the Dominican Republic. My friendship and my conversations with Alastair regarding Latin American writers he knew and had known – and much else – lasted till his death. Then I journeyed through his published work and manuscripts to edit *Barefoot – The Collected Poems* (Galileo Publishing, 2018).

Alastair used to say that Pablo Neruda, who he translated and knew well, was the poet Hugh MacDiarmid wanted to be (as in his 'Talking to 5,000 People in Edinburgh'), but never could be. Ordinary Chileans could recite Neruda's poems – he had found a way into their hearts. And you, Rabindranath Tagore, likewise a poet who lives in people's hearts, I find my way to you through Thomas Watling, a forger from Dumfries, transported to 'Botany Bay' in 1791. Watling became Australia's first professional artist, painting the flora and fauna of that country, just as his fellow convicts were made to clear scrub land and to dig ditches. Pardoned in 1797, Watling earned his passage back home by working as a portraitist in Calcutta. My speculative verse biography, *A Wild Adventure – Thomas Watling, Dumfries Convict Artist* (Polygon, 2014), is based on historical research and on my own visits to Sidney and to Kolkata: I needed to be where he had been. At times, throughout the book, as in this example from the sequence on Calcutta/Kolkata, Watling's perceptions and mine collide:

What would Watling give to see someone
Commandeer one of the swarms
of snub-nosed yellow taxis

That nudge, whinge and honk around town?
To see his hero lead them, red flag in hand,
roaring up Chowringhee,

Scattering
palanquins, peons, and hurcarrahs;
Making carriages bolt
and all the dainty parasols

Fly, till they fall gently into the Hooghly,
Like the silken blossoms of the Drooping Asoke;
of the delicate white

White Murdha.

It was while I was in Kolkata that I learned, from the Sirhan group of writers, of your fame, of your reputation as a 'World Poet'. But 'fame' is not the word for a writer whose works permeate a culture as do yours. This is part of what I was told: that every Bengali – or nine out of ten – will know seven, eight or nine of your poems off by heart. "Do you know another poet in the world of whom this is true?" says one of the Sirhanites. Another says, "I have lived all over the world and nowhere have I found people with such a poetic spirit as the Bengalis." At school, children learn of you through your songs and of their survival you were never in doubt. "He said his songs would last 2,000 years." I think of another poet, much closer to home, for whom similar things might be said. Robert Burns lived in Dumfries over the span of time Watling was away from it. From where I now write, I can see over the rooftops to the spire of St. Michael's Church where Burns is buried. He would have been sympathetic to the epigraph I chose from your work to introduce the section of A Wild Adventure set in Calcutta:

Over the ruins
of hundreds of empires,
The people work.

(from Recovery – 10)

The longer I have been Recalling Former Travels, the more I am aware of places that have been important to me in my life and in my imagination that I have overlooked, as reader and as traveller – New York and Russia, for example. Of course words have extended my map, but so have desire, love and loneliness. But we have to arrive at some destination. My most recent publication is a pamphlet, IS, beautifully produced by Hugh Bryden at Roncadora Press. Its source draws on two poets who have been important to me:

'The ideal occupation for a poet is the contemplation of the word is.' Seamus Heaney, responding to Milosz's line: 'It seems that I was called for this: / To glorify things just because they are.'

This is the ending of the second of the three sections:

IS

the wheat golden one side of me
vines ripening on the other
and I know I'm happy
when I can't find a song
to sing and must pitch
variegated nonsense
crazy mouth music
into the summer air -

happiness like madness
can be such a memory-less
loosening of the moorings

IS
Dung and death

oh, yes but

Ho! Ho!
Ha! Ha!

IS

also

fa-la la-la
rol-de-rol
rou-cou-cou-cou, my lovely

There are echoes there of Eliot and of Wallace Stevens; but I also hope Li Po, in his divine madness, would share my delight.

Note: The poems of Miroslav Holub quoted here were translated by Ian Milner and George Theiner. The poems of Zbigniew Herbert were translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Peter Date Scott. The poems of Vasko Popa were translated by Anne Pennington.

Lines from 'Mathiós Pasćalis Among The Roses' by George Seferis were translated by Kimon Friar. Those from Cold Mountain by Han-Shan (Jonathan Cape, 1970) by Burton Watson.

The poem, 'I'm Getting Out & Going Some 30 Kilometres Towards The Coast' by Antonio Cisneros (from *The Spider Hangs Too Far From The Ground*, Cape Goliard Press, 1970) was translated by Maureen Ahern and David Tipton and the three lines by Tagore were translated by William Radice (*Selected Poems*, Penguin Classics, 2005 edition).

Tom Pow's *Dear Alice, Narratives of Madness* won the Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust Poetry Book of the Year in 2009, the same year *In The Becoming – New and Selected Poems* was published. His latest poetry collections are *A Wild Adventure – Thomas Watling, Dumfries Convict Artist and Concerning the Atlas of Scotland and Other Poems*. *Recolectores de Nueces (The Walnut Gatherers)*, a bi-lingual selection of poems, translated by Jorge Fondebrider, was published in October 2015. *Barefoot – the Collected Poems of Alastair Reid*, which he edited, came out last year. He is currently Creative Director of *A Year of Conversation 2019* (www.ayearofconversation.com)

Some ‘Singing Translations’ of Rabindrasangit, with a Preface on the History and Practice of Translating for Performance

Matthew Pritchard

My primary intention in the following is to present some examples of Rabindrasangit, Tagore’s songs, as they might be rendered into English verse designed to be sung. As such it may seem paradoxical to be using the medium of print at all, rather than a vocal recital or recording – means that I very much hope can be used in the future to disseminate these and other translations of Tagore’s songs to those unable to appreciate them in the original Bengali. But presenting full performances requires consideration of many other factors beyond the choice of translation, and for now it is this which is my focus. (Those who know the original songs will be able not only to judge the translations below as translations, but in many cases to hear inwardly how they fit the melody. Those who do not, can at least judge to what extent they succeed as poetry in English, and for a sense of the music are invited to look for recordings of the songs in the original, widely available on the internet.) Before I reproduce and discuss some of my translations, a prefatory digression on the genre of the ‘singing translation’ seems in order. To many, whether they come from the worlds of Bengali music or Western art song or from a primarily literary background, the concept may seem unfamiliar, problematic, or even both at once; and while the obstacles to producing high quality translations for singing are undoubtedly considerable, it is worth understanding why they are worth aiming for in the first place.

Those who know Tagore’s songs and can place them in a transcultural context have made strong claims for the artistic achievement they represent – claims that may not come as news to Bengali music-lovers, but can startle aficionados of Western art song. Satyajit Ray stated in 1982: “As a Bengali I know that as a composer of songs Tagore has no equal, not even in the West – and I know Schubert and Hugo Wolf.”¹ Even if one believes that such culturally diverse traditions cannot ultimately be measured against one another, one is compelled to hear an opinion like Ray’s with respect. After all, as William Radice observes, to our knowledge, “no poet or composer other than Tagore was able to produce so endlessly and effortlessly words and melodies at the same time.”² For Radice as for Ray, the natural Western point of comparison is the Romantic tradition of the German lied; and what makes that comparison natural, despite the differences, is the common aesthetic goal of fusion between music and poetry.³ Tagore conceived of their unity in a successful song as akin to the ardhaniwara or hermaphrodite deity of ancient Hindu statuary – two distinct forms of being brought together in a single body.

It might seem logical, then, that if that fusion is perfectly achieved, it would be indissoluble, the text irreplaceable by any paraphrase in its own or any other language. We would face a musical version of the common poetic paradox that the better a poem is, and thus the more worth translating, the harder it is to actually translate. The “heresy of paraphrase” is a familiar axiom, one already foreshadowed for music by Ezra Pound: “a song must be sung in its original language...the perfect union of word and note is so subtle and rare a thing that, once attained, no substitute is likely to give satisfaction”.⁴ Yet Pound’s position was not uncontroversial in its day. Like all of his opinions, in this too he was an assiduous and uncompromising modernist, rejecting what he saw as the lax habits of nineteenth-

1. Cit. in Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, eds., *Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology* (London: Picador, 1999), p. 385.

2. William Radice, “Keys to the Kingdom: The Search for How Best to Understand and Perform the Songs of Tagore”, in *University of Toronto Quarterly* 77: 4 (2008), pp. 1095-1109 (p. 1100).

3. One important difference is of course that in many cases – except in the case of *bhāṅga gān* or lyrics set to existing melodies – Tagore composed both melody and lyrics, whereas European Romantic composers set existing poems by other writers to music. Another is that lied settings incorporated harmonized accompaniments, which Tagore did not provide for his own songs.

4. Ezra Pound [William Atheling, pseud.], “Music”, in *New Age* (31 October 1918), pp. 428–29, cit. Laura Tunbridge, “Singing Translations: The Politics of Listening Between the Wars”, in *Representations* 123 (2013), pp. 53-86 (p. 59).

century Romanticism. I have explored in a recent article the consequences of his modernist aesthetics for norms of poetic style in the twentieth century, and the effects this ultimately had on approaches to translating Tagore's verse, which have typically displayed a certain level of lingering discomfort with the Romantic 'tone-values' (as I call them, after George Steiner) of Tagore's poetic voice.⁵ My suggestion there was that, when we take into account both Tagore's principled Romanticism and his historical subject-position in the context of early twentieth-century colonial subalternity, preserving many of these 'tone-values' in translation actually makes sense, even when such a strategy is in tension with current expectations of poetic style. If Tagore demonstrated in his Bengali poetry an overtly sensuous palette of poetic effects, from dense rhyme and vigorous rhythm to luxuriant alliteration and assonance, in his English translations a concern with the holistic 'spirit' of a poem over its literal rendering, and in both a 'high' diction that could at times appear solemn, it was not without good reason. Rhetorical power and spiritual integrity were traits befitting the poet as public intellectual and ambassador for a civilization still struggling under the colonial yoke – a role very different from that adopted by Pound or his Western modernist successors.

Tagore's own approach to translation was a good deal less precious than Pound's. Influenced by nineteenth-century translational practice, his renderings both from Bengali into English and from English and German (which he seems to have known a little of) into Bengali tended to be free rather than literal: the spirit, not the letter, was what mattered. As Subhas Dasgupta records, he often refused the term "translation" altogether, and referred to his versions as "rewritings" or even "reincarnations" of the original.⁶ A well-known musical example is his famous song inspired by Burns's "Auld Lang Syne", "Purano shei diner katha", which alters both the melody (in triple time in Tagore's version rather than 4/4) and the poetic text, while keeping the mood and contour of each recognizable. Though not a song, metrical creativity is also visible in Tagore's youthful version of the Witches' Scene from *Macbeth*, which transforms the famous couplet "Fair is foul and foul is fair/ Hover through the fog and filthy air" into a four-line stanza, even more poundingly rhythmic than Shakespeare's original:⁷

*Moder kache bhalo-i mondo
Mondo jaha bhalo je tai,
Ondhokare kuyashate,
Ghure ghure ghure berai!*

That kind of skill in versification was beyond Tagore's capacities when translating into English, as he cautiously acknowledged;⁸ but he was glad if others were willing to try it. One person who did during Tagore's lifetime was Arthur Geddes, son of the Scottish geographer and polymath Patrick Geddes, who spent time with the poet in Santiniketan. His fourteen fairly short, but rhymed and metred, song translations were published posthumously in 2011, a few years after the appearance of the French musicologist Alain Daniélou's (largely unrhymed) translations of 18 Rabindrasangit into both French and English.⁹

Both Geddes and Daniélou wrote their translations to be sung, and had Tagore's blessing in notating and arranging them. (The Daniélou settings have been recorded by the Italian singer Francesca

5. Matthew Pritchard, "Of Harps and Vinas: Translating 'Tone-Values' in Tagore's Songs", in *Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry* 5: 1 (2018), pp. 92-103 (online at: <http://sanglap-journal.in/index.php/sanglap/article/view/178>).

6. Q.v. Subhas Dasgupta, "Tagore's Concept of Translation: A Critical Study", *Indian Literature* 56: 3 (2012), pp. 132-144 (pp. 134, 139).

7. Rabindranath Tagore, "Macbeth", p. 1, from "Anubad Kabita", Rabindra Rachanabali online at <http://rabindra-rachanabali.nltr.org/node/14261>.

8. Dasgupta, "Tagore's Concept of Translation", p. 141.

9. Arthur Geddes, *Fourteen Songs by Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. Marion and Claire Geddes (Bideford: Resurgence Trust, 2011); Alain Daniélou, *Rabindranath Tagore: Song-Poems/Poèmes chantés* (Paris: Michel de Maule, 2005).

Cassio, herself trained in Indian classical vocal technique.) The results can probably be fairly described as mixed. While there are moments in both the translations and Daniélou's arrangements that convey something of the wonder of the original, much is also lost along the way. Why then might their efforts have excited Tagore? Would he not have been better advised to counsel against such ambition, following his own advice to himself that "to translate Bengali poems into English verse form reproducing the original rhythm so that the words may fit in with the [musical] theme would be foolish for one to attempt"?¹⁰ Tagore's leading modern translator, William Radice, avers that in translating Rabindrasangit we should follow the standard practice of Western art song programme notes, and aim at producing a fairly literal translation of the text's meaning, acting as a supplement to the appreciation of performances in the original Bengali.¹¹ This is the approach taken too by Reba Som in her valuable book *Rabindranath Tagore: The Singer and his Song*, with accompanying CD and appendix of translations.¹²

Yet to understand why that approach will always, however sensitively implemented, fail to convey the full aesthetic value of Tagore's lyrical achievement, we must return to the point made above: the essence of that achievement, just like that of Schubert or Wolff, is in the blend of sound and sense, of words and music, which can ultimately only be felt in performance. Listening with a translation in hand not only divides one's attention, but never gives one access to the experience of those passages in which two different art forms miraculously become one: only if one can understand the words in the same moment as they are given their melodic inflection, harmonic colouring, expressive accent and pronunciation by the performer(s) will one grasp, and be moved by, the song one is hearing. Donald Francis Tovey expressed it more trenchantly: "it is a sure sign of an imperfect musical civilization when a public that does not know a foreign language prefers to hear foreign vocal works in the original".¹³

Is such an experience really possible through the veil of translation? History suggests that it is. Musicologists and critics today might turn up their noses at performing German lieder in English, but it used to be standard practice, and arguably was a crucial part of the process by which Schubert's songs spread outside their country of origin. All the early editions of Schubert in England were in English, and so were the earliest performances (such as Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient's debut of "Erlkönig" in a translation by Walter Scott).¹⁴ The situation was no different in France: indeed it was Richault's 1833 edition of *Six mélodies célèbres* by Schubert, with texts exclusively in a French translation by the popular chansonnier Pierre-Jean de Béranger, that helped establish the very term *mélodie*, subsequently used to describe the ruling genre of French art song, including those masterpieces by Duparc, Fauré and others which are the pride of French nineteenth-century vocal music. A later revival in the English song tradition, both "art" and popular, was significantly aided from the 1890s on by the Irish baritone Harry Plunket Greene, who performed British folk songs and German lieder alongside new art songs by Parry, Stanford and Vaughan Williams, and in the process more or less established the vocal "recital" as an English institution. Greene "believed passionately that songs should be sung in the language of the audience".¹⁵ That he sang lieder with tremendous effectiveness in English translation emerges from the most beautiful of his surviving recordings,

10. Tagore to Arthur Geddes, 18.2.1926, in Bashabi Fraser, ed., *A Meeting of Two Minds: Geddes-Tagore Letters*, rev. ed., p. 121.

11. William Radice, "The Future of Rabindrasangit", in Rama Datta and Clinton Seely, *Celebrating Tagore: A Collection of Essays* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2009), pp. 149-62 (p. 157).

12. Reba Som, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Singer and His Song* (New Delhi: Viking, 2009).

13. D. F. Tovey, introduction to vol. 5 of *Essays in Musical Analysis*, cit. in C. W. Orr, "The Problem of Translation", in *Music & Letters* 22: 4 (1941), 318-32 (p. 323).

14. Q.v. John Reed, "Schubert's reception history in nineteenth-century England", in *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. Christopher Gibbs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 254-62.

15. Desmond Shaw-Taylor and Alan Blyth, article "Greene, Harry Plunket", *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed July 27, 2016, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/11708>

made at the age of 69, “The Hurdy-Gurdy Man” (Der Leiermann) from Schubert’s Winterreise – a song whose expressive performance he analysed in detail in his primer *Interpretation in Song* (1912).¹⁶ The text is by Paul England, and is reproduced below as an example to show how an “art song” even of the highest artistic rank need scarcely lose any of its power in translation:

Yonder stands a poor old hurdy-gurdy man,
With his frozen fingers playing all he can,
Barefoot, shuffling sideways on the icy way,
Not a single penny in his empty tray.

No-one seems to heed him, no-one stops to hear,
Only snarling mongrels care to venture near;
Little does he trouble, come whatever may,
Still his hurdy-gurdy drones and drones away.

Wonderful old fellow! Shall I with you go?
Will you drone your music to my songs of woe?

The translation is not “perfect” – certainly not the penultimate line, with its awkward inversion – but it is good enough to sing, and no-one who hears it sung, self-accompanied, by Greene will forget the impression it leaves in his performance. Such a vivid effect could not possibly be produced by the original song performed to a non-German-speaking listener reading a translation in their lap.

Not all translations of *lieder* into English were as effective or competent. There is some justification for the verdict of Sigmund Spaeth in 1915 that the business of translating to music had hitherto been dominated by “grubbing hacks and soulless versifiers”, with a few published examples committing “nearly every possible sin” against the principles of good text-setting.¹⁷ But Spaeth’s article, followed by post-war contributions to the topic by some of the finest musicologists and critics of the era, such as Edward Dent, M. D. Calvocoressi and A. H. Fox-Strangways, formed part of a conscious, collective attempt to raise standards in this area – an attempt that, pace Arthur Graham writing sixty years later, did lead to the “production of a corpus of usable translations”.¹⁸

If Pound’s insistence on accepting no substitutes for the original “perfect union of word and note” ultimately defeated these endeavours, it was less for purely artistic than for social reasons, as has been convincingly demonstrated by the musicologist Laura Tunbridge.¹⁹ The emerging class divisions of interwar British society produced a corresponding division of genres that definitively separated “serious” classical from “light” popular or folk song repertoires during the middle decades

16. Harry Plunket Greene, *Interpretation in Song* (London: Macmillan, 1912), pp. 125-30; Greene’s 1934 recording can be found on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iW04f0lXUY>. It differs in small details from the text reproduced here, which is taken from *Interpretation in Song*, p. 125.

17. Sigmund Spaeth, “Translating to Music”, in *Musical Quarterly* 1: 2 (1915), pp. 291-8 (pp. 298, 296).

18. Arthur Graham, “A New Look at Recital Song Translation”, in *Translation Review* 29: 1 (1989), 31-37 (p. 36). For theoretical treatments, see Edward Dent, “Song Translations”, in *The Nation and Athenaeum*, 25.6.1921, A. H. Fox-Strangways, “Song-Translation”, in *Music & Letters* 2: 3 (1921), pp. 211-24, Michel-Dmitri Calvocoressi, “The Practice of Song-Translation”, in *Music & Letters* 2: 4 (1921), pp. 314-22, Herbert F. Peyser, “Some Observations on Translation”, in *Musical Quarterly* 8: 3 (1922), pp. 353-71, and Fox-Strangways, “Translation of Songs”, in *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 49 (1922-3), pp. 79-99. As for a “corpus of usable translations”, Graham fails to mention Fox-Strangways and Stuart Wilson’s *Schubert’s Songs Translated* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1924) and Schumann’s *Songs Translated* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929). Laura Tunbridge discusses one translated song, “The Name” (*Ungehduld*) from the former volume (“Singing Translations”, pp. 62-3) in sceptical terms, and as if its faults and eccentricities were representative, whereas in fact many of Fox-Strangways and Wilson’s translations from *Winterreise*, e.g., are virtually irreproachable. Also worth mentioning are the results of the public appeal for *lieder* translations made by the journal *Music & Letters* in 1921, published in “Song-Translations”, *Music & Letters* 2: 3 (1921), pp. 190-210, and 2: 4 (1921), pp. 299-313 (both Schubert); 3: 1 (1922), pp. 2-8 (Brahms); “Translations of Schumann’s Songs”, 3: 2 (1922), pp. 206-8; “Song Translations: Hugo Wolf’s Songs” and “Schumann’s Songs”, 3: 3 (1922), pp. 301-5 and 305-9; and “Song Translations:

19. See Laura Tunbridge, “Singing Translations”, p. 59.

of the twentieth century. Greene's recitals, like the recordings of opera singers from before the First World War – Caruso, Melba, Patti – had included items from both. Schubert, meanwhile, was not the property of any particular class of singer or audience: his songs appeared (in translation) in sound films, operettas and vaudeville, as well as on concert programmes, and lieder in general “travelled fairly easily between categories of high-, low-, and middle-brow art”.²⁰

Between the wars all of this changed. Increasingly, the culture of lieder was becoming dominated in Tunbridge's words, by an ideal of high-class “cosmopolitan connoisseurship”, and in the 1930s that came at a (literal) price. Recitals organized by the London Lieder Club from 1931 took place at the Dorchester Hotel with the audience attending in full evening dress, and cost three guineas (nearly £200 in today's money) for the series. Yet it was here – under the eye of Walter Legge of EMI, the Club's founder – that a now-standard routine in the performance of lieder was established, based on already established recording practices. It centred on the “crème de la crème” of international singers rather than local talent, performing in the original language, and mediated to the audience through printed translations and notes in the programme.²² The result “pushed the experience of classical music into ever smaller spaces, to be listened to and performed by the specially trained”.²³

In a day and age where classical musicians are more concerned than ever about the future of what is already in some respects a “niche” genre, wilfully restricting audiences no longer seems viable. It is thus not surprising that the direct appeal of singing translations has been making a comeback. Roderick Williams' and Christopher Glynn's performances of Schubert's *Winterreise* in a recent translation by Jeremy Sams have taken Schubert to a new range of audiences, from the Wigmore Hall to British secondary schools.²⁴ And when it comes to opera, as Jonas Forssell writes in his Foreword to the excellent handbook *Translating for Singing* by professional opera translators Ronnie Apter and Mark Herman, the strategy can allow Mozart to appeal as immediately to twenty-first-century teenagers as a musical in their own language would.²⁵ Moreover, the precedents need not be confined to classical music: the French *chanson* tradition is also heavily dependent on translation to reach beyond its cultural origins, and accomplished singing translations of Georges Brassens have been offered by Jake Thackray and Pierre de Gaillande. Musical theatre's directness of expression has similarly favoured translations, mostly from English into other languages.²⁶ In the case of Eric Blau and Mort Shuman's *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* (1978), the musical and translated *chansons* coincided, with individual numbers such as Brel's masterpiece “Amsterdam” being subsequently re-recorded by Scott Walker and David Bowie.

It is time to explore a little how this kind of translation works in practice. As both modern and older writers on the topic emphasise, producing workable singing translations involves compromise and constant mutual adjustment between as many as five or six competing aesthetic priorities.²⁷ This may sound a lot to deal with, but composers and singer-songwriters already deal with most of them when they create original songs. Peter Low's witty conceptualization of this challenge as a

20. Tunbridge, “Singing Translations”, p. 56.

21. Tunbridge, “Singing Translations”, p. 53.

22. Tunbridge, “Singing Translations”, pp. 74-5.

23. Tunbridge, “Singing Translations”, p. 76.

24. Christopher Glynn and Roderick Williams, *Winter Journey* (Signum SIGCD531); cf. Christopher Glynn, “On working with Roderick Williams and Jeremy Sams on ‘Winter Journey’”, *TheArtsDesk.com*, 5th May 2018 (<https://theartsdesk.com/classical-music/pianist-christopher-glynn-schubert-english-new-translation-never-walks-stilts>, accessed 4 April 2019).

25. Jonas Forssell, “Foreword” to Ronnie Apter and Mark Herman, *Translating for Singing: The Theory, Art, and Craft of Translating Lyrics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. xiv.

26. On the issues involved in translating musicals, see Johan Franzon, “Musical Comedy Translation: Fidelity and Format in the Scandinavian *My Fair Lady*”, in Dinda L. Gorfée, ed., *Song and Significance: Virtues and Vices of Vocal Translation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 263-97.

27. See e.g. Henry S. Drinker, “On Translating Vocal Texts”, in *Musical Quarterly* 36:2 (1950), pp. 225-240, who outlines “six requisites in an adequate English text for a vocal work” (p. 226); his list corresponds substantially with that of Peter Low's “pentathlon” – “The Pentathlon Approach to Translating Songs”, in Gorfée, ed., *Song and Significance*, pp. 185-212.

“pentathlon” (“you can’t win ‘em all”, in other words) is apt, and Low also neatly points out how the desiderata of a good translation relate to the specific demands of the individuals involved in the creation, performance and appreciation of song. The singer wants something singable, not unnatural or unpronounceable; the audience want something that flows musically and communicates meaning naturally; the poet and those who value the text as poetry want the meaning of the poem to be reflected; the composer and those who value the original song want the rhythm and melody of the music to be preserved; and everyone wants the new song to capture, somehow, that indefinable “spirit” or character that pervaded the original and made the translator take on the challenge of translating it in the first place. Where rhyme fits among these requirements has been a matter for debate, but depending on the song it may play multiple roles – reflecting the value of the text as poetry, relating organically to the structure of the music, communicating a sense of form to the audience, and last but not least, helping the singer remember their lines.

There is not space for a detailed account of each of these competing priorities here (for more on them, see Low’s articles and Apter and Herman’s *Translating for Singing*); but I will give a few examples from my own translations (below) of how I have gone about weighing them up against one another in practice. Most of these are cases where literal meaning has, in contrast to a more faithful, programme-note-style translation, been sacrificed in favour of what may seem a “freer” approach – but in fact is often just as tightly determined, merely being motivated by other than semantic factors. Singability and natural “flow”, for instance, are normally desirable in a translated song text, and where they enhance the energy of the music in a fast-paced song, they take on extra importance – as for instance in “Kharabāyu bay bege”. The appositions and inversions here might seem like impediments (“courage fresh”, “if your goal you’d win”), were the whole not propelled forward, using alliteration and consistent metre, as vigorously as the storm-battling boat it describes. Rhythm, meanwhile, is often – including in Bengali prosody – reduced to a question of syllable-count, and yet both in music and in English poetry, which is stress-based, the demand that one reproduce a fixed rhythm and number of syllables per line of poetry is “too rigid”, as Low rightly observes.²⁸ Strophic songs, after all, already require changes to rhythm and even syllable-count. When altering the line, from a musical perspective “the best place to add a syllable is on a melisma, and the best place to subtract a syllable is on a repeated note”.²⁹ But from a poetic standpoint, when faced with a draft translation that has many fewer syllables than the original, it may be necessary to invent text to fill out the line – the kind of approach that invites criticisms of “embellishment” and “padding”.

Low outlines one common translator’s tactic in this type of case – inserting a “plausible, natural-sounding adjective that coheres with the overall feeling of the text without adding anything very striking to it. If, for example, a foreign language describes water with a pentasyllabic adjective meaning ‘rough’, one may need in English to say ‘perilous and rough’.”³⁰ Such problems arise frequently in translating Tagore’s songs into English. For instance, first- and second-person pronouns (which occur repeatedly in describing the lyrical “I”’s relationship with God/the beloved) occupy two or three syllables each in Bengali, but only one in English. In the opening line of “Āmi cini go cini tomāre”, since “I know you” is four whole syllables less than “Āmi cini...tomāre”, I added the extra half-line “my heart is sure”. Another such case produced the insertion of “...no eye can show you” and “No heart can touch you” into lines 1 and 3 of “Nayana tomāre pāy nā dekhite”, again because both lines 1 and 3 in the original are eleven syllables long, whereas their direct translations are five.

28. Low, “The Pentathlon Approach”, p. 196.

29. Low, “The Pentathlon Approach”, p. 197.

30. Low, “The Pentathlon Approach”, p. 197.

“Tumi ebār āmāy laho he nāth” required a bolder “filler” at the start of the song through six words with no equivalent in the original text, employed to supplement the inevitable paucity of syllables in the main phrase “[you] take me [now] oh Lord”.

These are not the sole justifications for these versions, it is worth noting though, they were the original motivating factor. If they were nothing more than emergency responses to a metrical difficulty, then they would probably reveal themselves as “padding” even to those who do not know the original. Instead, “my heart is sure” makes more explicit a latent aspect of “Āmi cini go cini”’s original sense – that this is knowledge by intuitive, inner recognition, not banally “putting a name to a face”. It also puts an emotionally-charged word – “heart” – onto avocal melisma, providing a convincing semantic (and sonic) counterpart to the role of “tomāre” (“you”) in the original Bengali.³¹ The extra phrase repetitions in “Nayana tomāre” are a kind of rhetorical amplification, strengthening the emotion with which God’s distance is affirmed initially before being subsequently broken down. And finally, the prefixed phrase “All that I am is yours” in “Tumi ebār āmāy laho” outlines a motivation for the devotee’s plea “so take me oh Lord”, one which seemed to me to fit the submissive longing for dissolution in God expressed throughout the text – a kind of summative motto for the song as a whole, which is surely what a refrain should be.

Rhyme is a particular challenge in translating Tagore’s songs, and partly because I want to represent Rabindrasangit here to an Anglophone audience both as poetry and as song, I have tried to keep as much of the rhyme-scheme, and as many of Tagore’s extra rhyme effects, as was possible. The chief, recurrent difficulty is caused by the need to find a word that will rhyme the end of each verse back with the end of the first line of the refrain. This effect is crucial to orientating oneself within the song’s structure, since when one hears the new rhyme-word, one knows that the refrain will soon follow to cap it with its characteristic musical phrase. When a song has more than the standard number of verses, as is the case with “Amar sonar bangla”, one will need about half a dozen rhymes to use at this point, which will probably require some departure from literal fidelity in order to justify them. The translator will then have to be able to construct new poetic images or metaphors that substitute for those in the original – otherwise the difficulty will be insuperable.

Fortune came to my aid in the case of “Amar sonar bangla”. Though there was no way to make the fifth verse rhyme with “Bengal” and still include Tagore’s original image of British-manufactured cloth as a “noose” for his country’s neck, there was a highly relevant (indeed, since nooses are usually made out of rope rather than cloth, actually more close-fitting) alternative in the form of the word “pall” – a funeral cloth. In the case of “Shedin dujane dulechinu bane”, the issue was more one of “cultural translation”, seeking to replace an initial rhyme-word in the original that carries untranslatable cultural connotations – the “swing” (jhul[a]na) which for an Indian reader or listener conjures up romantic visions of Krishna and Radha in a forest, but which for a Westerner remains a prosaic piece of equipment on a children’s playground. An “arbour twined with flowers” gets close enough to the general meaning of the original, while also permitting rhyme with a thrice-repeated refrain that also deviates from the literal sense of its equivalent (bhulo na, “do not forget”, which this time would awkwardly occupy more syllables in English!): “sweet long hours”.

The songs given below, though conveying – I hope – something of the rhythm, mood and meaning of the original, might thus perhaps as fittingly be termed “rewritings” or even “reincarnations”, to use Tagore’s own words, as “translations”. Certainly in being read or performed they should not be

31. The bathetic effect that can result when this correspondence is ignored was comically illustrated to me by a friend’s description of once hearing the same song in an inept Italian singing translation – “Ti conosco, conosco...[pause] bene” (“I know you...well!”).

confused with literal transpositions of Tagore's words. Nevertheless here they are, offered as initial samples, hesitantly drawn from a vast repertoire, of the kind of approach that might be employed within a larger transcultural project of Rabindrasangit translation and performance.

On the seas the wind is high (Kharabāyu bay bege)

On the seas the wind is high, clouds fill the darkened sky –
Helmsman, 'tis time, let us go!
You grasp the tiller tight, I'll set the sails aright –
Heave-ho, pull and shout, heave-ho!

Hawsers heavy clinking, chains clashing, ring on ring, fear naught with the thought of their ship
sinking;
Now with patience fraying, none will stand delaying, so the rigging, restless swaying, cries, 'Oh
Heave-ho, pull and shout, heave-ho!'

If you count and choose the hour, courage fresh will soon turn sour,
Ask not, 'Shall I leave now, shall I wait?'
There are seas of doubt within, therefore if your goal you'd win,
Cross them first, before it yet grows late.

If the dark god of mischance enters his destructive trance, sets the winds for wrack and turmoil,
makes the towering billows dance;
You'll not row back, not recoil, with his rhythm you'll advance, sing your chants of victory to the
foe:
Heave-ho, pull and shout, heave-ho!

No eye can see you, no eye can show you (Nayana tomāre pāy nā dekhite)

No eye can see you, no eye can show you, deep within every eye you reside –
No heart can touch you, no heart can know you, for within every heart still you hide.

At desire's command, our minds incessantly run every way like a madman set free;
When my soul sleeps and dreams, then your gaze constantly over me shall keep watch, as my guide.

Abandoned by all, the one who has naught, he still has your presence, still your support,
And she who's shelterless, she who's distraught – beneath your shelter she may abide.
If not you, then no companion has graced my path, with life's measurelessness faced –
Yet as you carry us, we leave untraced how across time's sea your course you've plied.

I know that only through your life am I alive, with you as my life's goal alone can I survive,
So much I have of you and yet for more I strive, so much I know yet more knowledge to me's denied.
Always I shall find you, throughout your kingdom in this world and beyond, now and in time to come
In between you and I now there stands no-one, no hindrance shall us divide.

I know you, I know you, my heart is sure (Āmi cini go cini tomāre)

I know you, I know you, my heart is sure, stranger o so fair.
Far away on the ocean's further shore you dwell, o stranger fair.

It was you in the autumnal morning light, 'twas you on that spring-enchanted night,
'Twas you that my heart saw, o stranger, stranger fair.

To the distance my ears I was straining, I heard your voice such melodies sing,
My life I would bring you in offering, stranger o so fair.
Wandering the world so wide I have found that ocean's farther side –
At last I am a guest now at your door, o stranger, stranger fair.

All that I am is yours, so take me o Lord (Tumi ebār āmāy laho he nāth)

All that I am is yours – so take me, o Lord, take me.
When I feel you seize hold of my soul,
From that moment don't forsake me.

All those days that passed without you: to desire them were to doubt you,
In the dust they'll lie.
Into your light emerging now at last I'll evermore awake be.

Drawn by voices into their snare, walking paths I knew not where
They led me on, nor why;
Yet once I'm beside thee, head on shoulder lain, in thy words how will I mistake thee.

Secret guilts I would not confess, all stored dark in my mind's recess:
When these I'd deny,
Do not spurn me then for my impurity, but in your fire remake me.

That evening, on our own by a path (Shedin dujane dulechinu bane)

That evening, on our own by a path all overgrown we came to an arbour, twined with flowers;
If unsought your memory should summon back that summer wood, how could you disown those
sweet long hours?

You recall it clearly: on the evening breeze I poured out a stream of mumbled perplexities;
For an apt simile of your smile that answered these now my mind the heavens scours.

As we walked home slowly we found the path lit by and by: through the night sky rose the full moon.
That on such a night we should have met thus, you and I – what constellation granted us that boon?
Little time remains, and to age's pains are added those my heart in solitude sustains.
These threads were but part of separate lives' skeins – yet in that moment knotted, they were ours.

O how I adore you, my golden land of Bengal (Amar shonar bangla, ami tomay bhalobashi)

O how I adore you, my golden land of Bengal!

Ever anew your skies, and the breezes that rise as a flute, far off, sighs, keep my heart in thrall.

Mother, as your spring scent through the mango grove mild went, my mind would rove wild

In joy, oh mother;

And amid autumn fields, harvest-piled, how gently you smiled, let your sweetness fall.

With your cool shade you caress, with compassion, tenderness;

Beneath banyan trees your cloth you spread out wide, and on the leas at the rivers' side;

Mother, your lips' speech coats like honey each thought we sought to express

In joy, oh mother –

If in your eyes there floats a sadness, what griefs, what fears will your children befall?

In your vast playground I'd play, in childhood whiling time away –

All your soil and dust I'd smear on my limbs, as life with your treasure brims.

And as the day ends, evening-time now sends from each lamp a pure ray –

In joy, oh mother,

Then the dust of my games I wipe clean, to you I come running and in your lap crawl.

In your fields where the cattle graze, at quays where boats turn in relays,

Long noons there where birds are calling, in the shade sprawling of your country byways,

And in courtyards high with harvest grain I have passed my days

In joy, oh mother –

See, brothers of mine these are, each one, mother, these your herdsmen, farmers, all!

O mother before you now humbly my head I bow:

Bless me with the dust of your feet, to me it shall be the jewel in my crown.

Mother, at your feet I'll pile up all my poor man's wealth

In joy, oh mother,

And no longer buy a stranger's cloth, lest it, by stealth, become your pall.

Matthew Pritchard is Lecturer in Musical Aesthetics at the University of Leeds. After completing a PhD on the theory and aesthetics of melody in late Beethoven at Royal Holloway, University of London, in 2009, he took a one-year course of study in Rabindrasangit at Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, in West Bengal. Since then he continues to research and publish on the history of music aesthetics over the last two centuries in both German and Bengali contexts. Apart from working on a book manuscript addressing the history of the Romantic "aesthetics of feeling" in Western music, he has translated two of Tagore's essays on music (in *Sangeet Natak Special Issue 46: 1-4 (2012)*), and published on translation theory and Tagore's songs ("Of Harps and Vānas: Translating 'Tone-Values' in Tagore's Songs", in *Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry 5: 1 (2018)*).

Moldova

George Szirtes

I woke in a bedroom in Moldova,
The mirror was broken, the door locked,
The street was empty and the window frosted,
No soap in the bathroom and the sink was blocked.

Fake news, said the light in my brain.
Trust me, it's fake, it repeated. Moldova is a story and location
That can be redacted or deleted.

But this is my bedroom, I protested.
This is Moldova as it was meant to be.
The mirror here is genuinely broken,
The place exists in its own reality.

You call things names, said the voice, but names
Are objects we drop and they sometimes break.
This is the news: this the alternative.
The real may be real but this is fake.

We're in a bad place, I thought and lay down
On the bed. *We arrive any old how*.
Then fell asleep and dreamt of mirrors
and endless streets in downtown Chisinau.

Meetings with Strangers

George Szirtes

1

So one
arrives, at once,
without notice, warning,
a phone call, a text, or even
email.

So one
arrives at night
in a wet city street
with two handfuls of old baggage,
alone.

2

Arrive
by night. No words
necessary. Turn up
like weather, like a fitful gust
or rain.

Nothing
prevents you. Come.
The hour is what it is.
Any hour is welcome. All hours
are free.

The rain
won't stop for you.
The cold is setting in.
Nothing in life surprises you
by now.

3

So this.
So that. So one
moves under the radar
of the nerves into the system
called chance.

Chance calls
and cold calls. Snow
flurries. Voices on line.
This could happen to you, they say.
It could.

It could.
Everything could
and does. Vague clemencies.
Abrupt decrees. Arbitrary
winters.

4
Enter
and wipe your feet.
You don't know where those boots
have been. You don't know the weather
or street.

Morning
arrives by chance.
The bed is
unmade. Tuck
the night into your pocket and go.
Go now.

A Dream of Returning

George Szirtes

Some are dispersed, blown
astray by furious winds
never to return.

Some have vanished, lost
in forests of official
paper, torn or torched.

Those that can return
look around to find themselves
in dream property.

Home is nostalgia
for dream properties. The dream
property is real.

Returning is good.
Rediscovery is good.
Being home is good.

The rest is hotels,
and rooms filled with dream mirrors
with real furniture,

each hotel mirror
reflecting one hotel room,
one real property.

It is your mirror
and dream. Make your home in it.
Welcome home. Sit down.

George Szirtes is a British poet and translator from the Hungarian language into English. Originally from Hungary, he has lived in the United Kingdom for most of his life after coming to the country as a refugee at the age of eight. Szirtes was a judge for the 2017 Griffin Poetry Prize. He has won a variety of prizes for his work, including the 2004 T. S. Eliot Prize, for his collection *Reel* and the Bess Hokin Prize in 2008 for poems in *Poetry* magazine. His translations from Hungarian poetry, fiction and drama have also won numerous awards. He has received an Honorary Fellowship from Goldsmiths College, University of London and an Honorary Doctorate from the University of East Anglia. He also won the Poetry and the People Award in Guangzhou, China in 2016. Having retired from teaching at the University of East Anglia in 2013, he lives in Wymondham, Norfolk

Hawk Waiting

Joyce Caplan

The hooded hawk
has lost the light.
The weight of
his gaze deep in
his obsidian skull.

The wind's solace
pinioned by a
curved claw.
Everything become
still and waiting.

He knows the
ritual of the
starlings at dusk.
Night's chrysalis
a purse of pain.

Outside the feathered
snow curves its
chrysanthemum flight.
The gentle falling of
a single hour.

Hawk goes South

Joyce Caplan

The hawk roosts
in high trees,
his migrant vision
a focus of desire,
every corner illuminated
every shadow darkened.
In his sight the small birds
shine vivid in their song.

He settles his balance
on the branching world.
The day moon lies on its
back in a meadow of cloud.
Out at sea the bright
islands float their promises.
In earth blind, burrowing creatures
pursue a light they never find.

The night descends
through a rim of blood.
His open eyes become
the darkness that moves
the stars to the mind's
margin and back again.

Hawk Reaches the End

Joyce Caplan

The Hawk reaches
the desert edge.
Here the forgotten seas,
the rivers that cannot
return to mountains,
have become ocean dust.

His leather heart is
heavy with journeying.
Riding the wave of air
he trawls for lightness
above the rippled world.
Nothing within his gaze
but shifting grains
sifting through time's loss.

He longs for capture,
for the sun's throbbing
pulse to cease, for clouds
to fall into the sea, for trees
to become ordinary again.

Joyce Caplan is President of the Poetry Association of Scotland, Chair of the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (ScoTs), President of the Friends of the University of Edinburgh Library and has been Chair of the Scottish Poetry Library for ten years. She has been involved in poetry for most of her life, as a reader, writer and teacher as it has given her a dimension to human experience that has added value and meaning to her existence. Writing and teaching poetry for many years is how Joyce decodes the world and connects it to herself.

Springtime at the Bus Stop, Finland

Donald Adamson

After enforced garrulity
in the country of your birth
you return, relieved, to the simple kindness
of this land's silence,
the considerateness
of moving to the other side
when a half-known face approaches
so that neither of you is wrung like a wet cloth,
forced into a grunt or a greeting –

that is until at the bus stop
the woman you have waited beside for years
suddenly speaks to you
and you talk, she in her language, you in yours
and smiles are exchanged
and at last you find out her name
and sun comes out, the daffodils are blooming
and it's spring today
and maybe again tomorrow.

Winds from Afar

Donald Adamson

The present is a foreign country.
They do things differently
from us oldies who must navigate
between strange manners
and unaccustomed values
with our sails drooping, oars
poking the water,
fearful of Scyllas or Charybdises
that would drag us down.

Unless, well-freighted
with our loudness and deafness
we decide we might as well be
disgraceful,
blown by winds from the other side
of our life's round globe
and not giving a damn
for anyone's patronising or pity
or eyes rolling.

Donald Adamson is a poet and translator, writing in English and Scots. In 1995 he was awarded a Scottish Arts Council writer's bursary. He has lived in France, Iran and Kuwait, as well as Finland. He was a lecturer in the universities of Helsinki and Jyväskylä, Finland, and has translated Finnish poems by Eeva Kilpi, Lassie Nummi, and others. He has won prizes in many poetry competitions; also translation competitions, including First Prize in the Sangschaw (translation) Competition 2017. His latest pamphlet collection, *All Coming Back* (Roncadora Press in 2019), touches on the 'third age' of life, considered ironically, humorously, and poignantly. A further pamphlet in Scots, *On This Bit o the Road*, will be published by Tapasalteerie in 2020.

Ghungroos

Ana Maria G.C. Maguire

Doors, rooms, spaces
Known faces
Unknown tongues buildings distances

In my hands you are heavy
Tlim....Tlim.... Tlim.... vibrating
Tied around my ankles you become light
Part of my skin, my flesh my bones

Pranams
Tatkars
Ta Thei Thei Tat
Aa Thei Thei Tat
Wrong foot!

How I wish you were like the red shoes³⁸
Oh! But not their evil power.
Graceful, dialoging with pulsing tablas
Becoming a perfect Patra
Pujas
Vandanas
Taranas
Thumris

You have been resting in a quiet place for a long time
Maybe dreaming of vibrating sounds
Waiting for what you were made for
I'll listen to the echoes
To fulfill our desires

Notes:

Gungharoots – ankle bells used in some Indian dances

Patra- dancer

Pujas: Ceremonial worship.

Pranam: Reverential salutation.

Tatkar: The foundational rhythm that is used for footwork in Kathak dance.

Vanadana: Invocation

Tarana: A vocal composition in Hindustani classical music.

Thumri: A genre in semi-classical Indian music.

³⁸. Red shoes refer to a Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale in which red shoes signify vanity. A girl wears red shoes and they make her dance, but her vanity regarding the red shoes meets with severe punishment.

Katha Yatra

The Beginning

After a performance by Shilpika Bordoloi at Dance Base – Festival 2017

Ana Maria G.C. Maguire

She no longer was She.
But the light flowing with the river,
Shimmering on the leaves of the island trees
Along the seasons.
She offered pujas to gods to appease,
To protect from monsoon rains, so they
Would not destroy lives and their lands;
Travelled in boats crisscrossing to different
Margins and turned into the flights of
Birds that stayed for a while and the ones
Which are always there.
She danced to the colours of the music
Of the Island till the sun set.
She was Majuli and the Brahmaputra.

Note: Majuli is an island in the River Brahmaputra in Assam.

Terms of Venerly

Patrick James Errington

Faulty faucet, last aspirin, radiator gasping
in the corner. Another storm heaped up
against the windowpane like another
half-forgotten fault, a promise half-kept.

Good thing, she thinks, she has set
her life so solidly, her routines stacked like
cinderblocks against – she can't say what.

Outside, twelve swans, wind-frayed and
white against the deep green of the field.
The sea distant and darker still. She can't

quite say what keeps them, year after year,
coming back. A love ago, her husband
shot one as it broke from a clump of aspen
and birch, branches bare as wire. He'd sworn

it was an accident – he'd meant only to scare
the birds out of the neighbour's new sown field.
It took what seemed like ages to die, thrashing

in the weeds and gorse hedge, coming slowly loose
from its life, so deeply buried in the tangled
thorns, no easing it free. She listened to it

all that night, and the next, for years. By
the time, she gets back from the village shop,
the swans have all gone. The house too has gone
dark and unbearably attentive when she enters.

It is, she supposes, as it ought to be; no one
home. She's not sure why she even bothers
with that word anymore as she tips another

pill out onto counter. It seems so desperately
white, alone against the water-stained wood.
She imagines the swans somewhere struggling

in the wind above the sea as she moves carefully
about, carefully proportioning her life, shuttering
the windows, putting away pears, fresh bread,

one small pint of milk, a new plastic hairbrush,
each thing fitting neatly to its place, every motion
to its measure. The walls creak in the gathering cold.

If she could, she'd make living the term for all these
practices, animal rituals, empty rites. It doesn't
hold anything together, not quite, but enough.

Ways to Watch the News

Patrick James Errington

As a child, I would stranger myself for every elsewhere.

In the sixth floor flat of what I always meant to be, I'd find
a man swithered with the disease of not knowing

where to set his hands. With the TV on mute, aflicker
like gunfire far off, he can hear the neighbours

shifting about their lives, the hard edge of love, arguments
rounded on the walls.

In the small bedroom of the present

tense as a hare hunted in wet grass, I still count
my meanwhiles into sleep. Hushed visitors stutter

the light behind each slightly open door.

In the town

church of feigned forgetting, I was faithless in the choir,

my voice hard, words spat loose like teeth after that fight
I always knew I wouldn't win.

In the tool-shed out back

behind my life, all handles are smooth, blades black with dirt.
If the paper still came in the mornings, then each violence

could be just a coin from some long defunct country,
on display in a museum, let's face it, I'll never visit.

There's a pale sound of change in someone else's pocket.

I used to ask myself, if I came back to me, which of us would

be the poorer for it.

In every leave-taking, taking.

'Looking forward to going home, I was necessarily looking backward'

– Muriel Spark, Robinson

Now That I Look Back On It

Patrick James Errington

who's to say the past has to be behind?
Why not ahead? I wander now only roads

beyond an ancestor I'll never meet, weaving
my stray ways through the grass, through

her language. I wish and often this was a
language where the past is above. In Alberta,

all winter, the prairies would be heaped
white with it. Here in Edinburgh, each wet

flagstone collects its fallen histories. I watch
a shoal of gulls across the Meadows rising

like a myth that isn't mine but I can't help
believing. Rain weaving feathers to my skin.

Patrick James Errington is the author of two chapbooks of poems, *Glean* (ignitionpress, 2018) and *Field Studies* (Clutag Press, 2019), and the French translator of PJ Harvey's poetry collection, *The Hollow of the Hand*. Born in Alberta, Canada, Patrick holds an MFA from Columbia University and a PhD from the University of St Andrews. He lives in Edinburgh.

Tavonga Arrives in 2009

Elsbeth Brown

Tavonga is sprinting across the fields in Scotland
because the early morning bus is late.
His new coat from the charity shop flaps like wings.
He fled from Zimbabwe where he ran a hospital.

Here he is a care assistant, who must be in time
fearing he will lose his job and frugal pay.
He feeds his ancient patients, more relaxed
among the old and the ill, the same everywhere.

Tavonga is disconsolate in his shabby town flat
feeling the cold and damp of an Edinburgh winter.
In Zimbabwe he tried to improve things,
and had to escape. Now he sends money home.

On Sundays Tavonga sings joyful hymns in Destiny Church.
It is spring when his girlfriend Anaishe arrives.

Fetch the Ferryman

Elsbeth Brown

Now is the time to call the ferryman.
My bag is always packed and ready
hidden under the bed.
I kneel and touch it sometimes
awake in the lonely night.
My gold watch is sewn into the lining.
Small tins of food are packed too.
I have lost count of the years
they have been there; a part of me.
I have forgotten who I am.
Now I must find out, leave in the gloaming
and head for the boat by the shore.

Elsbeth Brown's most recent publication, a poetry pamphlet, *Starling and Crane*, was published by Indigo Dreams Publishing and was launched in Dunbar on 12th August. A date for an Edinburgh launch is still to be arranged.

Previous publications are poetry collections, *A Crab in the Moon's Mouth*, *Markings* and *Skunk Cabbage*, IDP. Her poetry and short stories have been in *Southlight*, *Markings*, *Gutter* and *Poetry Scotland*, *London Magazine*, and several anthologies. She has run creative writing workshops in Edinburgh. Particular writing interests are James Clerk Maxwell, John Muir, and Green Men. Her play, *The Spectrum*, concerning James Clerk Maxwell, has been performed at the Edinburgh Fringe and read at the Edinburgh Science Festival. Elsbeth has enjoyed reading in many venues throughout the U.K from the Isle of Wight Literary Festival to the north of Scotland, where her family originate.

A Can of Coke

Yogesh Patel

A can of Coke
in a reverie
on the seashore...
an attempt to guzzle the sea
a roaring laughter
a kick in the rear from the waves

The sky's bosom
filled with smoke...
a birth, the curse of cultural con
Look, ripping the sky's sari
Duryodhan laughs!
With a blistering arrogance
obliterating the forests
extracting a giant poster
a culture splashes its name across
on the forehead of the city
With the collar on man's neck
this Craven wants to suck the sea
in its gorge
But Poseidon kicks its bottoms
and the arrogance shattered
now licks the sand...

(Winner of the Co-Op Poetry Award on the environment)

Home

Yogesh Patel

Only if Abhimanyu knew!
The name of the seventh war zone is
London

And even if there was a way back to the womb
Krishna
has nothing more to say

(from poet's collection, Bottled Ganges)

Yogesh Patel edits Skylark and runs Skylark Publications UK as well as a non-profit Word Masala project to promote SA diaspora literature. A founder of the literary charity, Gujarati Literary Academy, he has been honoured with the Freedom of the City of London. With LP records, films, radio, children's book, fiction and non-fiction books, and three poetry collections to his credit, in 2017, he was presented to The Queen at Buckingham Palace. A recipient of many awards, including an honour in April 2019 in NY as a Poet-of Honor at Nassau Community College for the Matwaala Lit Fest, he has read in the House of Lords and the National Poetry Library. His recent collection of poems is *Swimming with Whales*. His writing has appeared in *PN Review*, *Shearsman*, *IOTA*, *Envoi*, *Understanding*, *Orbis*, on BBC, and more. He is also anthologised in MacMillan, Redbeck and other anthologies. By profession, Yogesh is a qualified optometrist and an accountant. Author's Websites: www.patelyogesh.co.uk and www.skylarkpublications.co.uk

Abode of Peace Within and Without

Medha Bhattacharyya

Abode of Peace within and without
My home is everywhere
Under the sun, moon and stars
Under the breezy shades of enormous
Trees at Śāntiniketan,
On the carpet of dewy green grass
The crimson hue of the sun
Playing hide-and-seek
With the branches of trees
Swaying in the breeze,
I arise, I awaken...
I do not feel the lack of that Omniscient Being
Present in Nature.
Looking up the sky at Śāntiniketan
I wonder -
“Is this the same sky Rabindranath Tagore gazed at?”
On seeing the River Padma
I wonder -
“What must Tagore have thought?”
Those amazing translations
He inscribed relaxing
Amidst the greens and waters of Shilaidah
Yet it was the leisurely activity
That bore the fruits
Of his lifelong labour!

Listen to that unspoken word
Listen to the deep rumble of clouds
Listen to the songs of Rabindranath
Celebrating six seasons of Bengal
Listen, see, smell, taste and touch
Feel Nature all around
Realize the abode of Peace within and without!

Medha Bhattacharyya is an Assistant Professor, Department of Basic Sciences and Humanities (English) in Bengal Institute of Technology (Techno India Group), Kolkata, India. She has delivered invited talks in universities on Rabindranath Tagore and Translation. She has presented papers on Communication and Creative Writing. Her poem “Tale of a Parrot” featured as one of the winning entries in Inspired by Tagore international anthology published by British Council and SAMPAD South Asian, India, and has been invited to several literary festivals and programmes to recite her poems. Her poems have featured in several publications.

Deepali

Stuart A Paterson

My name's from a language of poetry,
chiming lines lit up by glowing sound.
Hear me in bhajans, slokas, stotras,
flowing through mottoes, samavedas
from then to now, the liturgies found and
spoken by wind into the listening ear.
Am I alive, am I even here,
this ghost whose poem of name survives
long centuries of dull corrupt neglect?
I don't expect you're really listening
but if you are, lift your sinking head to know that
I am happiness blown into your life,
a chain of little lamps of brightened
syllables, Deepali, as real as air,
as real as all the joys no longer there,
as we remember them, give thanks to them,
step back into the future where we'll sing
and bring ourselves to join the ranks of them.

Today I won't talk about fairies

Stuart A Paterson

and how they live among an island's
small lovely flowers, or being Scottish,
or how I'm counting down the hours
until the sun appears, or my garden,
or the cat who purrs when I stroke his ears.

Today I won't be writing about being
a man or interesting anecdotes
about my travels in Myanmar,
its colourful locality, how beautiful
the children are, that time in Laos I saw
amazing sails, the way those sounds
& colours haunt me beautifully even now.

Today I won't be writing about Samia
Shahid. There is no need to talk of honour
& a killing in the same outraged liberal breath.
Such things speak for themselves in any
language, better than the likes of me can
when I can't even write of being a man.

Author's note: Samia Shahid, originally from Bradford, died while visiting her relatives in her ancestral village of Dhok Khinger in Pakistan. Her family initially claimed she had a heart attack, but an autopsy revealed she had been strangled and raped. Her husband Syed Mukhtar Kazam repeatedly said she had been murdered because her family were angry that she had left her first husband, her Pakistani cousin Muhammad Shakeel, to marry him in 2014.

Diwali, Manchester 2001

Stuart A Paterson

I think of windows as I think of caves,
entrances perhaps to deeper places
where we huddle tight together close to
loss of life and faith, fanning embers of
ourselves to raise a last hurrah of flame
against our ever-shortening days.

We put up curtains, shutters, blinds, conspire
to guard and keep inside and just for us
what fire and light we have. Outside, out there
where dark October wears its lengthening
overcoats, each window fades from sight
and any hope of refuge from the night.
No welcome here, they say, best find another
door, another window, go away.

But not that night. That night I saw a city
ring its doors and windows full of candlelight,
each diya winking, blinking, burning with
the oxygen of sudden sumptuous life.

And the skies, a blooming rangoli of
pattern blasting winter to some other
distant hemisphere, sweet smells of kheer,
gulab jamun and rasmalai like welcome
mats before the tongue, an opened door
into that place, those caves you'd thought
long emptied of the basic warmth of faith.

Reason is my god, a cold and dark one
sometimes left to linger long upon the
doorstep like a peddler selling trinkets.
Then, I was selling nothing, was offered
everything as Manchester became
a festival of light in all the names
of everyone afraid of shortening days,
closed doors, inevitable giftless nights.

Stuart A. Paterson lives in Galloway, south-west Scotland, and has had poems widely published in several countries. In June 2019, he was a visiting writer at Rhodes University and St. Andrew's College in Grahamstown, South Africa. A former Robert Louis Stevenson Fellow and BBC Scotland Poet in Residence, his latest collection is 'Looking South' (Indigo Dreams) and he will have a volume of poems in Scots for children published in late 2019. He's currently writer in residence at The Stove community arts hub in Dumfries.

The Vagrant in Me: a prose poem

Nandini Sen

Winter days rushed through me as if I were dead, The grey sea poured into this town. The red sky and the rain smelt like rotten fish. I didn't grow up in this town. Do you want to know my story?

I grew up in an Indian city where every night I witnessed the rim of a dark abyss. I saw clearly a spot on the edge where, if I rolled over in my sleep, I could plunge into the depth of the void. Yet, was I afraid? Only chuckled, 'how easy it would be to fall in.'

Colourless, with no light to speak of. No sun, no moon or stars. At a set time, a mysterious boy walked down the darkness with his girlfriend. For the first time I understood jealousy. All that remained was a sort of quiet resignation.

I was sitting alone in a huge vacant mansion as our Banerjee grandma called it. Imagine that my mouth was fixed with Sellotape. My eyes watched the collection of dolls in her flat on the tenth floor. My feelings were wrapped in layer upon layer of thin membranes. My mind was still a blank, as I aged a day at a time. I was still fast asleep. I woke up and took a risky sojourn suddenly with new roots in a new foreign land.

Nowadays I make their beds every morning in an Edinburgh bed-n-breakfast. I have left my building in India which suffered a flood with scars on every wall. We sold our flat and the new robust owner scattered all my old LP records and the framed photographs of Ma and Baba On the ground, by the lift, on the staircase painted with betel leaf juice. I wouldn't throw away my LPs, though I do not have a decent stereo in Edinburgh.

Occasionally, nowadays I listen to CDs and rock n roll on YouTube with our meals, in between short disrupted talks. I juggle between making beds and grilling some veggies and fish. Nowadays my only luxuries are the free libraries, aroma of tea and vagrancy inside the attic of the house. I live in the past- small and lonely, trying to forget the spicy spaces in India.

I stroll the posh streets of Edinburgh with my ordinary dress selling mysteries, myths and moons. I never imagined one day I would stand on your square dreaming of your opera houses fanned by the North Sea,
Scared of your useless trams and expensive trainlines round the corners of your spectacular castle.

Such a babble and bubble of Empire now extinguished with the Grenfell Tower tragedy, Not from the Windrush Generation though. They can never go back home. Only lovelies and beauties remain along with ghost films.

I am an immigrant and nothing else, I have a son who will face the stigma cast on him if I go for the life of a vagabond, If I really become the gloomy homeless. You will look at my son with pity, which is a dangerous pathology that could ooze out from your stomach occasionally. Could you, the audience, not think that this is a tragedy? And I remain as an eternal purgative which my fatigued, coward lover takes as a spiritual pill.

Nandini Sen is a short story writer and poet. Her story 'Mrs. Sen' was selected by Edinburgh, City of Literature (UNESCO), Story -Shop, Edinburgh International Book festival, 2016. Her poem 'With a Different Stroke' was published in an Edinburgh based journal called The Ogilvie, Edinburgh Creative Review. One of her pathbreaking literary works, 'Women and Gender in Rabindranath Tagore's Short Stories from Anthropological Perspectives Challenging Kinship and Marriage', is published in Anthropological Journal of European Culture in November 2016.

In 2015 she founded the literary blog called ReadinGLa(d)sses' In course of time it has created its own distinct space in the blogging culture. A doctorate in anthropology, Nandini is currently working as a research associate at Heriot Watt University. Nandini lives and writes in Edinburgh.

The Branded Hand

Brian Johnstone

They printed this in Florida,
a slave state still in forty-five,
its marshal with the power
to mark a man for life. Yet,

he can't have lived for long
till someone in New England
passed comment on his scars,
desired that he submit again

to steel that clamped the arm
lest movement spoil a plate
and new technology distort
the marks that he displayed,

his palm extended, opened
to their lens. As it had been
to coals, to branding irons,
the double S that found him,

in The South, slave stealer,
thief of someone's property
he only saw as fellow men
in need. But, in The North,

a saviour offering the chance
for freedom crossing borders
meant to those who'd borne
the scars or more themselves

in multitudes, unrecorded,
never photographed, but
fixed, as is this single print,
in time, a record of its hand.

"This Daguerreotype was taken Aug. 1845. It is a copy of Captain Jonathan Walker's hand as branded by the U.S. Marshall of the Dist. of Florida for having helped 7 men to obtain 'Life Liberty, and Happiness.' SS Slave Saviour Northern Dist. SS Slave Stealer Southern Dist."

Inscription on reverse of photographic plate

first published in *Liberty Tales* (Arachne Press, 2016)
for original image see

<https://justdohistory.wordpress.com/tag/jonathon-walker/>

The Key

Brian Johnstone

My pocket, heavy from its heft,
seems weighed down by its count
of fewer grams than all the coins
I scrape together daily for our food.

Take the roads we've travelled,
passed from border to border,
the waters we've crossed; my fear
of loss, of letting it drop, ever there.

What door it will open in the life
we're leading, the life we hope
one day to lead, I cannot know.

Its cut steel pressing still against
my chest says all I can allow. I had
a house, my own door, lives ago.

Brian Johnstone's poetry has appeared in Scotland and over 20 countries worldwide. He has published seven collections, most recently *Dry Stone Work* (Arc, 2014) and *Juke Box Jeopardy* (Red Squirrel, 2018), plus a prose memoir *Double Exposure* (Saraband, 2017). He is a founder and former Director of the StAnza: Scotland's International Poetry Festival. www.brianjohnstonepoet.co.uk

Rider on the Waves

Tapati Gupta

He had a moon on his head
He rode the waves
The stars dismantled their light
In his blue-gold hair

I saw him from my door
That opened on to the waves
The dark rocks pleaded
To go and greet him
But were held fast to the sea floor.

What did he hold in those delicate hands?
He was too far away for me to see.
Where was he going?
And what did he ride?
A blue horse or a blue whale?

That was on the Bay of Bengal.
Was it blessings or destruction
That he threw upon the shore?
I saw something floating on the waves.

I saw him again on the Indian Ocean
And then upon the Arabian Sea.
His body streaked with foam
Muscles flexed in anger or desire?
Froth mixed with moonbeams
In his hair. Was he on a horse or a boat?

Then in the Aegean he dipped himself
Was blued all over. Picked up round pebbles out of the cerulean waters
That licked the white houses of a little Greek island.
He seemed undecided, even distracted.
Was it flowers or swords
What would he gift to the world?

Through a crystal clear wall of glass
I saw him once again
Holding on to the tail of a dolphin
Travelling from the Black Sea
Along the Bosphorus
Towards the Marmara Sea.

He had neither horse nor boat
Only dolphins to convey him
With blurred flowers all over his body.

Was he going across the Mediterranean
And into the Atlantic?
To donate his gift of flowers and peace?
Or would he hold the blue horse
By the mane and the rein
And breathe the purple breath
Of annihilation
Would he be transformed from a blithe body on a dolphin
To a terrible, beautiful, fire-breathing demon?
Turning the ocean one bloody, murky, sticky, gluey grave?

Piraeus in the Twilight

Tapati Gupta

The jungle of ships
The masses of life
Still on the water
Wriggling on the land.
Cargoes from nowhere
Cargoes from somewhere.
The unloading and loading
Inert bodies now in motion.
When suddenly the clinking of glass
Made me glance across the table.
With the twilight aslant
On his taut downy chest
His stubble a mix of steely grey reflecting the evening sky.
His sharp features bemused in a questioning glance ...
He said something which I did not understand.
'I not Greek,' I said.
Why not? Be Greek, be easy, come travel with me, said those roving eyes....
I dare not. You are alien, you are fierce.
You may be Agamemnon's ghost whom I met in Mycenae.
He rose and with a bow disappeared down the quay,
The half-drunk ouzo left stinking on the table.
His retreating figure and its shadow oblique
On the cobbled street was magnet to me.
Since then I have searched for him in both hemispheres
And always I found only his sky-high shadow.

Hands

Tapati Gupta

They were folded neatly on her laps, those hands.
She sat opposite me in the Metro
Was she going to work?
No perhaps not, not with that kind of hands.

Hands that brought memories of the sea,
Of lands of coral and white shells,
Of fans that cooled north Calcutta afternoons
Folded her husband's shirt while thinking of a childhood heartthrob.

Hands that could not hold on to bus rods
Nor tap on the computer keyboard
But could only hold tight on to the balcony railings
Made warm by the pressure of her breasts.

Strange strange hands, covered by sweet, sweet flesh,
Reddish brown with the blood of Cleopatra
Smelling like Helen of Troy
Sad as Cressida
Worshipped as Sita, Savitri and Behula
Supine on her unempowered thighs.

Tapeti Gupta, has been writing poetry in English and a few in Bengali since her student days in the 1960s but she takes it as a means of self expression, and a creative outlet that refreshes her busy schedule as a Professor of English literature, and a writer of research articles on literature and theatre. She is also a painter with expertise in oils and sketching. She has participated in art exhibitions, and has been an art critic in well known Calcutta newspapers of Kolkata and an art journal published from Delhi.

Her poems have been printed in journals and newspapers. At the moment she is preparing for publication a book of poems. Dr Gupta has travelled extensively in both the West and the East in connection with her academic research and her cultural exposure is reflected in her creative writings.

The Naughty Word of Wow

Alan Riach

(with acknowledgement to Janet Sorensen)

How naughty is the body when it cannot be controlled
Completely! The word you hear through history is, 'Wow!'
It wasn't there in Dr Johnson's potent 'English' Dictionary,
A naughty wee omission, maybe, since its source is definitely Scots!
Track it back, you'll find it in the later 1400s: it's there, indeed, most learnedly
In Gavin Douglas's Eneados, and then as now expressed
(According to the OED) aversion, surprise, admiration,
Sorrow and regret, commiseration, or just 'asseveration'. (Wow!)
And later it's described as being like a bark, a waul, a howl, a cry or call –
But Johnson seemed to think its place was locked within a world
Where language is degraded and debased
By 'its necessary connection with flesh and blood'. Well, wow
Again. It does not take position at a distance then from such
Disinterested participants as the disembodied Latinates
Of Anglo-British authorities. It blurs the line
Between the human being and the animals we each of us are.
(A bark, a caterwaul, a call.) It is a naughty sound, a claim
Of bodily, physical life, on reason's strict priorities.
And there it is in Fergusson, in moments when the 'caller oysters'
And 'haddock lug' are gorged upon, or liquor 'fires the mouth'
And burns the throat, or Edinburgh morning's stench is 'snell'
And acrid. Wow again. Oh, thanks! to Gavin Douglas, and Reekie's own,
That Robert Fergusson, for such a word as this, and used so well.
Reminding us of what Sam Johnson knew, as much, so well,
But did not deign to speak of or to tell.

America, not only

Alan Riach

What measures presence and weight
Goes beyond birdsong and leaves,
The presence and weight of a canyon, a prairie,
A city, Manhattan or Denver, a town or a territory, where?
Wyoming, Caithness, Mojave, Qinghai –
The presence and weight of a body,
A man, a woman, a child, someone old –
No desert exists but is man-made
It all comes in like something from Outer
Space, Unknown, an invisible sieve, a tape,
A set of scales that opens the eyes as it fibrillates
The conscience, like laughter, which is what only
The world has allowed
To blow all entrapment to shreds,
As Ed Dorn said. Except, except, except that
Now, that laughter itself is shredded and failed:
Would that the drone of unimagined, unimaginable
Poverty, occupy the heads of these, incredibly wealthy
People. Deserts, their minds, man-made.
Who could begin to talk or to hear,
To listen to anything these people say?
Except, except, except for their vast aberrations,
Their great psychological failures, of sympathy,
Of understanding, of good action, apt behaviour:
Their thick pathological blockage. So much
Can be analysed but there is not much laughter
In that. The world's entrapment does
Proceed apace. So keep reserves. Dorn was right.
Remember. It's work, not employment, we need.
It's air, not packaging, we need.
It's laughter, songs and company.
And solitude, in the summer sun.
And birdsong persists, as it does.
That is this: those vulnerable things,
Those things we live and care for.

**Looking out from the Tower of the Chrysler Building,
watching the Wall Street Crash
After Federico Garcia Lorca, from Poet in New York**

Alan Riach

When I see them all, I see
Young black men lifting out the spittoons,
Swimming in spit, swilling with spit,
Young men trembling in fear, that escalates
To terror, and they pale and their skin
Turns white and their armpits soak and stink
And their shirts stick to them, shivering,
As the executives shout down to them, scorn them,
Scare them so utterly, terrorise and terrify
Each one of them, all self-esteem pouring out of their flesh.
And young women drowning in oil
That covers their bodies, that glosses
Their curving bodies, their limbs,
That will drown them.
Thousands and thousands of women and men,
Working with hammers, working with violins,
With the clouds of whatever their work is,
Surrounding them, and they can't see what's there,
Where they're walking, bungling, crashing into walls,
Cracking their brows and splitting their foreheads,
Bashing their brains on the whitewashed walls, the closed doors,
Screaming in front of the buildings, shouting despair
In the agony shot down upon them,
Of fire, the burning, driving them crazy,
Of snow, the freezing, driving them crazy,
The poison in filth in their skulls, shit in their heads,
Shit in their nostrils, shit squeezing out of their tear-ducts,
Filling their eyes, bulging out of their ears,
Screaming as if all the nights of the world
Were concentrates filling their brains, black nights,
Stinking, blinding, poisoning, sharpening
Screams though their voices, thousands and thousands
Of voices, breaking your heart just to hear them all,
Screaming. Then all the city trembles. This city.
New York. Then all the world over, all small village cities,
Like Paris, Madrid, and London, all trembling,
But this mother-city, this city of cities, all trembling,
Like little girls, trembling. And all knocking over
All the small glass bottles of oil, cracking the glass,
The noise drowning out all the music there is,

And because, and because, for we know why it is:
Because, and because, we demand – it is not
That we say should be given, but because,
As we say, we demand, our daily bread,
Because it is ours by our right, and the blue flowers of alder
Are blossoming now, are there, all in bloom, and are ours,
And that all of the harvest is ours, and the harvest,
Again and again, the harvest of tenderness,
Humanly tender, is ours, by all human right, our right, and because,
We demand that all Earth's will will be done
And the fruits of the Earth will be given to all,
To whom they belong, to everyone, each one of them, women and men,
Those to whom the fruits of the Earth belong: they belong to us all,
To us all. And they must now be given to all.

Alan Riach was born in Airdrie, studied English literature at Cambridge University from 1976 to 79. His academic career has included positions as a post-doctoral research fellow, senior lecturer, Associate Professor and Pro-Dean in the Faculty of Arts, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand 1986–2000. He returned to Scotland in January 2001 and is currently the Professor of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow. His many publications include, *Hugh MacDiarmid's Epic Poetry* (1991), *Arts of Resistance: Poets, Portraits and Landscapes in Modern Scotland* co-ed with Alexander Moffat (2009), *The Winter Book* (poetry collection, 2027) and *Thali Katori: An Anthology of Scottish South Asian Poetry*, co-ed with Bashabi Fraser (2017).

Asylum

Alison Flett

This is madness alright, the biting heat and cut-glass
skies, the lunatic shrieking of lorikeets, crackling through
trees with their colours so bright it frightens
the mind. Through all of our days

the sun blisters, pops, sweating out heat till you'd swear
the air was breathing. Petals of yellow
wattle and red dregs of bottle-brush gum clot
at path edges, the thick bloody heat scabbing round

your tongue. They tell me some nights Molly despairs
sneaks out to sleep on the so-called lawn. I imagine
her running over sun-scraped grass, waving her
fists at the mixed-up stars, mad moon slipped

to a Cheshire grin, map of a far life flapping
in her eyes. They find her in the morning, nightie
damp around her thighs, eye-hollows filled
with salted tears. I'd buy her some dreams

if I could, for sure. I'd fill those hollows with
the rolling fog of home, little dun-coloured birds
I'd place in her hands, let her feel the soft flutter
of their grey English hearts. You and me Moll

I'm always saying to her, one day we'll go
home. She doesn't know what I'm on about
no more, picks at the roses embroidered on her
nightie, rolls her eyes like she's still on the ocean

heading for some other crazy country.

Author's note: In the late nineteenth century, many of the inhabitants of the Adelaide Asylum were British immigrants who had struggled to cope with the demands of a new life in a country very different to their own.

5 ways to cross the timeline

Alison Flett

1. Leave your house at midnight and stand where you can see the fridge-white moon. Make an empty cage with forefingers and thumbs and raise it to the sky. The moon is no longer distant; it's right here in your hands. It's yellow, not white. Its bright face is singing.
2. Once there was a bedroom with a dressing table, a flesh-pink comb, a string of yellow beads. Shadows you gave names to striped the walls. Your family slept around you and the place you called home was filled with their breathing.
3. Press your face against the airplane's window to see beyond your own image. Down below there's the tinsel of rain but here droplets pop in the sun.
4. Now breath is the sound of your own body, an echo chamber filled with un-named shadow. When you sink into it the dark moves back against the walls.
5. Forget the crumpled lump of machine-washed address in your pocket. Remember instead how puddles on the road become heat-haze when reached. Remember the infinity of preludes. Remember you are here.

First Creek

Alison Flett

At the
moment

there is
no flow

only
the empty

plates of
puddles

their
surfaces

reflecting
scraps

of sky
holding

a few
leftover
leaves.

Way back

there's a

beginning

I don't know

how to get

to, a source

somewhere

deep in the

country and

an old name

the first that

was given to

this creek. I'd

like to know

that name but

I don't know

who to ask. I am

sitting at the point

Alison Flett: Originally from Scotland, Alison has been writing poetry since the early 1990s when she was part of a group of writers (including Irvine Welsh and Ali Smith) who were published by small presses Clocktower Press and Rebel Inc. Her work was also included in many anthologies including *Dreamstate: New Scottish Poets* (Polygon), *Ahead Of Its Time* (Jonathan Cape), *Modern Scottish Women Poets* (Canongate) and *100 Favourite Scottish Poems* (Luath Press).

Her collection *Whit Lassyz Ur Inty* (Thirsty Books, 2004) was shortlisted for the Saltire First Book of the Year Award. She has performed her work on national television and radio and at literary festivals in Britain, Europe and Australia.

Since moving to Australia she has been published in various anthologies and journals including *Cordite*, *Rabbit*, *Southerly*, *Westerly*, *Irises: The University of Canberra International Poetry Prize 2017* and *Buying Online: Newcastle Poetry Prize 2018*. In 2014 she was shortlisted for the Whitmore Press Manuscript Award. She is an arts reviewer for *InDaily*, poetry editor for *Transnational Literature* and publisher at Little Windows Press.

Done for the Day

Reza Haq

I'm done with roaming and groping too,
like the slanting light in winter, I'll rest now -
my day will grow shorter and shorter each day,
my nights, longer and longer each night.

There are no fights left for me to fight,
no milestone to touch, no promises to keep;
under the shade of an audacious tree
I'll go to sleep, leaving the clocks

to their ticking; just a few blocks
away from where I used to live, I'll let myself
leak into the tree and disappear
like the winter light in spring, to come back

and blossom at night when the rains set in
and smile at a lone lover in her swing.

There Was a Ship

Reza Haq

No white ship on the horizon -
only the vast empty ocean
framing the whole vision,

every morning I climb up the hill
but it's just the ocean serene, still
stretching miles after miles, even the shrill

seagulls are gone I don't know where
and I wait here with a looming nightmare:
the horrid chuckle of my mother

wakes me up, shattering my sleep,
my mother whom my father had dumped into the deep
pit of a live volcano when her belly could no more keep

the secret of her secret love; will my fate be the same?
will he never come back, as he came
in a white ship with a beautiful name?

Let This Madness Remain

Reza Haq

Let this madness remain;
this broken windowpane,
let it remain too;
Jinnah's bi-coloured shoe
refuses to rest in peace;
let Goths go to Greece:
if that sets Prometheus free,
if that brings the olive tree
back to life, I'll play Lear
without a crumb of fear
again and again:
let this madness remain.

Reza Haque teaches in the English Department at St. John's University, New York (Queens Campus). He received his PhD from Flinders University, Australia, where he also completed an Endeavour Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in 2016. He co-edited *The Shadow of the Precursor* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) and has published internationally on Indian English fiction, Amitav Ghosh, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Hasan Azizul Huq. Reza is also a poet and Translations Editor for *Transnational Literature* (Australia).

Mending fences

Chrys Salt

Beneath the fallen fence
the flower-bed suffocates,
has nowhere to grow.

‘We will mend fences
tomorrow’,
you say.

Although the barriers are down
fierce territorial imperatives
forestall our stampede
into the neighbouring garden.

An urban Ghandi,
breeding curry leaves
under his tea-roses,
mildly attempts the gap
with the universal language of grins.

Without the fence
the children, who do not observe
such niceties,
rampage over his borders
delighted

and mend fences
today.

Chrys Salt is a trained performer and broadcaster as well as widely published and anthologized poet. She has performed at festivals across the UK in Europe, the USA, Canada, Finland and India and won numerous awards including a National Media Award (CRS). A New Writing Bursary (English Arts Council) Work Development Grant (Scottish Arts Council), a Fringe First from The Edinburgh Festival, has published seven books for actors (Pub: Methuen Drama) and nine poetry collections. In 2012 *The Burning* was selected as one of the 20 Best Scottish Poems. In 2014 her pamphlet *Weaver of Grass* was shortlisted for the Callum Macdonald Memorial Award, she received Creative Scotland Bursary to finish her penultimate collection *Dancing on a Rock* (Pub: IDP).

Her most recent collection is *The Punkawallah's Rope*, rooted in her visit to India in February 2015 and appeared at The Kolkata Literary Festival with transnational poet Professor Bashabi Fraser. She was in receipt of another Creative Scotland Bursary to research material for her next collection about the Gold Rush and visited The Yukon earlier this year for this purpose. Work for this is now in progress. In 2014 she was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for Services to The Arts and is listed in *Who's Who*.