

The Poetics and Politics of Translation in Contemporary Drama, 1960s-1990s

Avishek Ganguly

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
2012

© 2012
Avishek Ganguly
All rights reserved

ABSTRACT

The Poetics and Politics of Translation in Contemporary Drama, 1960s-1990s

Avishek Ganguly

This dissertation studies a group of twentieth-century plays from India, Ireland, Nigeria and Britain that have rarely been read together. Through close readings of dramatic texts by authors like Utpal Dutt, Brian Friel, David Edgar and Wole Soyinka and, I examine the significant place of translation figured as dramatic technique in contemporary drama and theatre. The dissertation, therefore, adopts a more formal rather than substantive logic of comparison. Translation, in drama and theatre studies, is usually invoked to either describe the transformation of a literary text from page to the stage, or by way of a more general understanding, as the literal transfer of plays from one language into another. I look at translation within rather than of a dramatic text. This approach allows me to address the insufficient attention that figurative uses of translation have received in drama and theatre studies, and make two critical interventions: first, to demonstrate how a dramatic technique figured in translation disrupts the assumptions of what appears to be a constitutive monolingualism in the writing and reception of drama and theatre. Since the ascendancy of performance studies in the nineteen sixties, critical work on drama and theatre has taken an anti-text, and by extension, anti-literary stance. By contrast, my reading is mindful of the performative aspect of these plays without necessarily privileging it at the expense of the literary in so far as such a distinction can be consistently sustained. The second

critical intervention is to locate moments in the texts when acts of translation create new social collectivities and hence serve as a point of departure for a political reading. The emergence of social protest movements on the one hand, and the fall of communism at the end of the Cold War on the other frame the different imaginations of collectivity that I trace in these texts. The first and second waves of decolonization in Asia and Africa, and their subsequent postcolonial predicaments productively supplement this framework. My dissertation also relates to the category of translation as it organizes the prevalent concept of 'world literature,' which in its focus on the novel has been insufficiently attentive to drama. I trouble as well as extend the logics of classification by recontextualizing the authors beyond their dominant national-literary configurations.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Contents	Page
I	Introduction	1
II	Staging Indigeneity: Translation and collectivity in Utpal Dutt's <i>Teer</i> [Arrow]	10
III	Translation, Collectivity and the Scene of Teaching in Brian Friel's <i>Translations</i>	50
IV	The Politics of Translation and the Poetics of (Epic) Storytelling in David Edgar's <i>Pentecost</i>	90
V	Staging Blasphemy and Conversion: Figures of translation in Wole Soyinka's <i>The Road</i>	143
VI	Conclusion	180
VII	Bibliography	184

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak for being a magical and exacting teacher, and an extraordinarily generous advisor. I sincerely thank Martin Puchner for teaching me about all things theatrical, and always pushing me to be a better writer. I want to thank Partha Chatterjee for being an exceptional intellectual mentor for over a decade now, and for nurturing this project from its inception, through its mid-life crisis to its eventual completion. Bruce Robbins has always been a source of unstinting intellectual support and encouragement. I sincerely thank the other members of my committee: Gauri Viswanathan and Brent Edwards. I would like to acknowledge the help of several libraries and librarians: the Columbia University Libraries, the National Library of Ireland in Dublin, the libraries at the Center for the Study of Social Sciences and the Natyashodh Sangsthan in Calcutta/Kolkata, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, the Rockefeller Library of Brown University and the HELIN Library Consortium in Rhode Island I am very grateful to David Edgar for letting me access his personal papers. In Calcutta, I would like to thank Sova Sen and Bishnupriya Dutt for opening the doors to Utpal Dutt's personal library and papers, Samik Bandyopadhyay for his generous advice and help with archival sources, and Naveen Kishore for making the Seagull Arts and Media Resource Centre an welcoming place for visiting researchers. In Delhi, I would like to thank Sudhanva Deshpande and Mala Hashmi of Jan Natya Manch. For their teaching, encouragement and advice at different stages of graduate education I would like to thank the late Edward Said, David Damrosch, Nicholas Dames, Nicholas Dirks, and Reinhold Martin. Sudipto Chatterjee,

Julie Peters, Ben Baer, Jisha Menon, Olakunle George and Rey Chow have offered valuable advice during different stages of the dissertation project. I am grateful to Etienne Balibar for taking the time to comment on my project in the middle of teaching an intense seminar on Hegel. I thank Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Marcel van der Linden, Stathis Gourgouris, W.B. Worthen, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Alan Ackerman for their comments and suggestions on sections of Chapters 1 and 3 that were given as papers at Oxford, Linz, Columbia, Berkeley, Frankfurt and the MLA Convention at San Francisco. Among my fellow students and friends whose conversations have contributed in many ways to this project, I would particularly like to thank Andras Kisery, Lauren Walsh, Hannah Gurman, Richard So, Nathaniel Farrel, Rishi Goyal, Matt Sandler, Eugene Vydrin and Alvan Ikoku at Columbia, and Saugata Mukherjee and Urmila Dasgupta in Delhi, who were there long before there was any dissertation. I would also like to thank Joy Hayton, Virginia Kay, and Pam Rodman at the English Department Office, Ella Turenne, Catherine La Sota and Sarah Monks at the ICLS Office, and Salvo Candela first at ICLS and then at the Dissertation Office, for their help and support in negotiating the twists and turns of Columbia officialese. All my families have been extremely supportive throughout the process of writing. Raahil, to his great chagrin, has been forced to share the first three years of his life with 'daddy's work,' and I will always be grateful to him for that. My greatest and most enduring debt is to Diya Das for her extraordinary qualities of love, humor and intelligence that have helped us live through, contribute to and support this project in more ways than anyone else.

I. Introduction

The figurative use of translation, understood literally as an act of inter-lingual transfer, has had a vibrant career in contemporary creative and critical literature. A dazzling range of cultural and political acts has been read as translation, which in turn has altered dominant ways of thinking about translation.¹ Drama and theatre studies, however, have insufficiently engaged with translation limiting its usage to either the above-mentioned practice of rendering texts of plays from one language into another – “translation proper” as Roman Jakobson called it – or, as a description of the process of transforming a play from text to stage.² Scholarly work on theatre and translation has recently directed our attention towards this inadequate engagement, with one study going so far as to claim the beginning of a ‘translational turn’ in the field.³ It is in this context that I propose a reading of translation as a dramatic technique and political instrument in contemporary theatre. My dissertation, “The Poetics and Politics of Translation in Contemporary Drama and Theatre, 1960s-1990s” reads a range of plays and playwrights from diverse geographical areas – Utpal Dutt/India, Brian Friel/Ireland, David Edgar/Britain, and Wole Soyinka/Nigeria – in an attempt to explore the rich and varied relationship between the figure of translation and

¹ Iftikhar Dadi, “Translation and Contemporary Art,” in *Tarjama/Translation: Contemporary Art from the Middle East, Central Asia, and its Diasporas*. Co-edited with Leeza Ahmady and Reem Fadda (New York: ArteEast, 2009)

² Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” (1959) in Lawrence Venuti ed. *Translation Studies Reader* 2nd Ed (New York: Routledge, 2004).

³ See, for instance, Maya E. Roth and Sara Freeman eds. *International Dramaturgy: Translations & Transformations in the Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker* (Brussels: PIE-Peter Lang Press, 2008) and Roger Baines, Cristina Marinetti and Manuela Perteghella eds. *Staging and Performing Translation: Text and Theatre Practice* (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

contemporary theatre in a global frame. While discussing the dramatic and literary *oeuvre* of these authors in general, each of my four chapters focus on close readings of at least one influential play that has come to mark a decisive turn/shift in their dramatic practice and political project. Translation, in my usage, becomes *figurable* following the early theorization of the concept in Fredric Jameson's cultural criticism as becoming "visible in the first place, accessible to our imaginations" i.e. rendered conceptually as well as imaginatively graspable.⁴ Through a series of readings of the figure of translation my dissertation attempts to work out a socially informed theory of translation in the contemporary moment.

Philosophical thoughts about translation often make their first tentative appearance within the reflections of a translator, after she has finished her task, lending an unique, almost genre-worthy status to the 'Translator's Preface,' and Walter Benjamin, writing towards the beginning of the last century, was no exception.⁵ In his influential, and by some accounts pioneering, essay "The Task of The Translator," written as an introduction to his translations of Charles Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens* in 1923, Benjamin presented some of the key animating ideas of contemporary

⁴ For the earliest articulation of this idea see Fredric Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: Dog Day Afternoon as a Political Film," *College English* 38.8 (Apr 1977), 845. Some critics have read the notion of figurability as a precursor to the latter idea of 'cognitive mapping' in Jameson's thought. Jameson argues that class contradiction has been insufficiently represented and theorized in film studies because class has been viewed primarily as a static category, a separate stratum/aspect/unit that can be studied individually. He gives the example of 'Method Acting' as an example where class is figured as being in conflict but nevertheless static and self-contained, producing a psychologized personal alienation. Jameson's reconceptualization of class is similar to my attempts to expand the reading of translation vis-à-vis drama and theatre beyond an instrumentalist view of the former and making it figurable as a dramatic technique.

⁵ I am thinking, for instance, of James Strachey's "Introductions" to his English translations of Freud, Talcott Parson's "Prefaces" and "Introductions" to his English translations of Max Weber and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Translator's Preface" to the first English translation of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.

translation studies. The most important among them had to do with the destabilization of the original/translation binary, thus challenging the dominant expectations of fluency and transparency espoused by a linguistics-based approach in translation studies on the one hand, while opening up the possibilities of a resistant re-coding of the act of translation on the other. It is this latter aspect that has been actively developed by postcolonial writers and critics for instance which, in turn, has contributed towards the contemporary consolidation of translation as a political, ethical and cultural practice.⁶ For the genealogy of a socially informed theory of translation with which I am concerned in this dissertation, however, we need to look further back, perhaps at Friedrich Schleiermacher towards the beginning of the nineteenth century. Writing a formal defense of his then controversial translations of Plato, Schleiermacher had advocated for what Lawrence Venuti has recently called “foreignizing” rather than “domesticating” translation. The historical omission in this reading of Schleiermacher, however, as Venuti also shows, is his assumption that such a practice of translation could also double up as an important tool of nation-making available to the educated elite in Napoleonic Germany.⁷ Instead of French cultural domination then, German cultural nationalism. Of course, such uses of translation are not unique to nineteenth century Germany and they continue to be deployed in the present to secure a range of geopolitical goals – we only need to think of the beleaguered, contemporary fate of the

⁶ Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism and the Colonial context*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Politics of Translation” *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1993); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1994)

⁷ Schleiermacher, “On the Different Methods of Translation” (1813); Venuti, “Genealogies of Translation Theory,” (1991).

Iraqi translators who agreed to work for the U.S. military forces in the war – but what is significant for my purpose here is the invocation of a social unit ('the nation') as the producer and the product of translation. But, the most sustained use of translation for the constitution of the social is probably found in the even earlier instance of the massive 'Translation Movement' undertaken by the imperial state of the Abbasid Arab Caliphate that oversaw the translation of ancient Greek, Indian, and Persian texts of philosophy and sciences into Arabic from the eighth through the tenth centuries C.E.⁸ My idea of the social in a socially oriented theory of translation moves beyond the concept of the nation-state (or even that of the transnational) and takes the shape of newer collectivities without pre-imagined or essentialized constituents that are staged, as I show in my readings, through a dramatic technique of translation that also serves as a political instrument in these plays. When Tejaswini Niranjana in her influential work on postcolonial translation suggested that translation is a political act of containment that needs to be reclaimed by the ex-colonized subject as a practice of resistance and transformation she was still talking about 'translation proper.'⁹ I attempt to reconceptualize the figure of translation as a political instrument by focusing specifically on collectivities staged within the dramatic texts. Thereby, I also hope to move beyond another familiar and somewhat restrictive binary idea of communities formed by translation that inevitably ends up into two groups: translators/producers and readers/consumers.

⁸ For an authoritative study of this remarkable translation movement see Dimitri Gutas *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁹ Niranjana, 1992.

The first chapter discusses the work of contemporary Bengali playwright Utpal Dutt. Dutt came of age as a theatre actor, director and eventually playwright in mid-nineteen fifties and early nineteen sixties India. Starting off with Shakespeare in college, the heady years of newly achieved political independence from the British colonial rulers, moved him towards theatre work in the language of the masses, Bengali, and with more pronounced political tendencies. A growing sympathy for revolutionary communist ideas on the one hand and a homegrown theatrical talent honed by first hand experiences at the Berliner Ensemble, the Moscow Art Theatre, and flagship English theatre venues like the Chichester Festival on the other, steered Dutt's theatre into a direction (seen as positive or negative depending on the reader's politics) whose fulfillment came in the shape of *Teer* [Arrow] in 1967. The provocation for the play – a recent armed peasant-autochthon insurgency in North Bengal – was local, the presentation – documentary theatre meets agit-prop meets indigenous musical performance – more eclectic, even international. After all, Peter Weiss had just staged his documentary theatre piece on the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, *The Investigation*, in 1965, and there was a global revival of agit-prop among workers theatres. Dutt was very much attuned to these theatrical trends, and while David Hare was probably unaware of his work when dramatizing *Fanshen* (1975), inspired by William Hinton's well known account, in prose, of revolution coming to a Chinese village, it may not be a stretch to point out that a play like *Teer* anticipates a play like *Fanshen* in interesting

ways; not the least of which has to do with the erstwhile constellation of artists and intellectuals engaged in a global staging of Maoist political thought.¹⁰

Having explored the normative postcolonial situation of post-independence India through the work of Dutt, I turn in the second chapter, towards the “anomalous state” of postcoloniality in Northern Ireland and the work of its most famous playwright. Brian Friel’s *Translations* (1980), by now a classic, is mandatory on reading lists of modern Irish literature. I see it as dramatizing a series of “acts of public translation.” The most significant of these acts of public translation staged in the play is the first comprehensive Ordnance Survey of Ireland carried out by the English Sappers between 1826-45, which was also engaged in Anglicizing Irish place names in the interest of colonial governmentality. Such public deployment of translation – deployment used deliberately to retain the sense of a military-strategic imperative – however, I argue, appears in an interesting and productive contradiction with what is evidently the playwright’s preferred mode of translation. Friel, drawing upon George Steiner’s conservative and at times complex theories on the subject of translation, has expounded on the multiple aspects of this mode elsewhere but its most elegant expression found in the play is perhaps contained in the phrase “interpreting between privacies.” This is what Hugh, the beleaguered hedge school master in County Donegal says to Maire, his last remaining student, when she asks if he would consider teaching her English in place of the traditional Irish language instruction: “I will provide you with the available words and the available grammar. But will that help you to interpret

¹⁰ William Hinton, *Fanshen: a documentary of revolution in a Chinese village* (New York: Vintage, 1966).

between privacies? *I have no idea. But it's all we have.*"¹¹ Critics have already noted Friel's use of the extended metaphor/theatrical conceit whereby while all the characters speak Irish English on stage the reader and audience gets to figure out when someone shifts to Irish. My reading attempts to move beyond this obvious dramaturgical innovation and locates the play's dramatic technique in the figure of translation defined as "impossible yet necessary," modeled on the double bind of Hugh's decision to teach English mentioned above: "I have no idea. But it's all we have."

In Dutt and Friel's work, I focus on translation conceived in ways that are closer to its literal imaginings i.e. as a dramatic technique that works through and with bilingual and multilingual socio-cultural situations/ interactions in the interest of articulating author-backed political positions. What these readings reveal are the contradictory and contingent nature of such stagings of translation in so far as they undercut authorial intention and/or signal alternative trajectories of emancipation from the oppressive conditions under which the translations were mobilized. In the last two chapters on English playwright David Edgar and Nigerian Wole Soyinka, I shift my focus from the literal presence of translation in dramatic texts and attempt to examine the more figurative manifestations of translation. Edgar's staging of translation in his

¹¹ *Translations*, p.67. 'The Troubles' was a period of conflict in Northern Ireland from the late-1960s till the late-1990s, when the "peace process" eventually culminated in the "Belfast Agreement" on 10 April, 1998. It involved Irish nationalists and republicans, and a constellation of unionist and loyalist paramilitary forces, the British Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The cause of the conflict was nationalist/republican opposition to Northern Ireland's status within the United Kingdom, and the domination of and discrimination against the minority nationalist (mostly Catholic) community by the unionist, pro-Britain majority.

A 'hedge school' described a community institution/education practice found mostly in rural Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries. While they were not always held outdoors, as the word hedge might indicate, they acquired a secretive dimension when Catholic schools were banned in colonial Ireland.

award winning play *Pentecost* (1995), the second of a trilogy exploring the disappointments and hopes as well as the political and socio-cultural complexities and alignments in post-communist Eastern Europe, foregrounds the relationship of supplementarity between text and performance, dialogue and gesture in its attempts to dramatize a problematic, a neo-Babelian horizon as a panacea for contemporary geo-cultural conflicts. I propose an alternative and evidently under-theorized topos for reading Edgar's translational ethics and politics: I argue that the genre of the classical oral epic is centrally staged in the play, and that it provides a detour and a displacement to address the important questions not only of text and performance but also of a practice of translation that confounds accepted notions of the original and the imitation. Understood in this fashion translation also becomes a productive figure for approaching the troubled and unequal relationship between Europe and its East.

Continuing the exploration of the vicissitudes of the figure of translation in contemporary drama and theatre, my last chapter on Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka treats translation most powerfully as a figure of other significant movements in the play: I read acts of conversion and blasphemy, for instance, as figured in translation. In fact, I would go so far as to say that Soyinka's dramatic technique in *The Road* (1965) appearing at a crucial political-aesthetic juncture in his life is actually a theatrical analog of translation. Refocusing the overwhelming critical attention devoted to Soyinka's use of traditional Yoruba ritual in his dramatic practice to a reading of other historical and political acts like colonial religious conversion and subsequent blasphemy that figure in

his work, I hope to open up a larger critique of the fetishization of ritual to the exclusion of anything else in drama and theatre studies.

From a reading of translation as dramatic technique to translation as a political instrument, from a staging of the figure of the translator as one of the key characters in a play to the dramatization of translation as a figure of performative acts such as religious conversion and blasphemy, from the use of translation as a theatrical resolution to a political and linguistic problem of multilingualism in a text to the exploration of the act of translation modeling the formation of a political collectivity – my dissertation explores the figure of translation on multiple registers across several texts, and hopes to foster an aesthetically attuned and politically astute comparatist and transnational literary criticism in the global present.

II. Staging indigeneity: Translation and collectivity in Utpal Dutt's *Teer* [Arrow]

If we think of 'world literature' as a mode of circulation and reading rather than simply a canon of texts,¹² then it is possible to claim that Utpal Dutt (1929-1993) entered world literature in the late-nineteen sixties: his documentary play *Ajeya Vietnam* [Invincible Vietnam] (1966), a pioneering effort in modern Bengali theatre, was translated and staged as *Unbesiegbares Vietnam* at the Rostock Volkstheater in the former GDR in 1967;¹³ Peter Weiss, who was carrying out his documentary theatre experiments around the same time, would produce his own Vietnam play *Viet Nam Diskurs* (Vietnam Discourse) two years later. *The New York Times*, bestowing unusual although not unsuspecting attention on a communist playwright staging rousing political theatre in far away Calcutta, published three review articles on Dutt's plays between 1965 and

¹² Here, I draw upon David Damrosch's argument for thinking about world literature in *What is World Literature?* (Princeton University Press, 2003) where he extends his reading to ancient and pre-modern texts thus complicating prevalent ideas on the topic. The debates and discussions around the concept of world literature are far from settled and my use of the term here signals more a critical evaluation than an uncomplicated endorsement of its current definitions.

¹³ Utpal Dutt, *Natakasamagra. Vols I-VII* [Collected Plays Vols I-VII] (Calcutta: Mitra & Ghosh Publishers, 1995-1999). A link to a record of the Rostock performance of *Ajeya Vietnam* can be found at: <http://www.ddr-hoerspiele.net/lp/unbesiegbares-vietnam.html>

1968, a prolific period in his theatre making when he staged *Krushabiddha Cuba* [Cuba, Crucified], a dramatization, in the form of a political thriller, of an episode of the Cuban Revolution of 1958-59, and one of his more well known plays *Manusher Adhikarey* [For the Rights of Man], his dramatic adaptation of the 1931 trial of the Scottsboro Boys in Alabama, when some black youths were charged of raping two white women only to be acquitted later.¹⁴ The final consecration came in the form of a profile and an interview published in the influential *The Drama Review (TDR)* in 1971 as part of a special issue on "Theatre and the Third World."¹⁵ A reading of such multiple political and theatrical contexts, I would argue, makes it imperative to undertake a recontextualization of postcolonial authors like Utpal Dutt (India), Brian Friel (Ireland) and Wole Soyinka (Nigeria), but also David Edgar writing out of 'late-Britain,' beyond their biographical and national-literary configurations. It can also help to produce a comparatist framework for reading contemporary world drama. While the concept of world literature is most often mapped in terms of the modern novel, I am proposing a co-articulation of drama and theatre with this new comparative model. The thinking of world literature is often organized through translation, whose relationship with drama and theatre studies has so far been primarily focused "on the transfer of scripts from

¹⁴ See J. Anthony Lukas, "Indian is in jail but play goes on," *New York Times* 25_Nov 1965 and "Once a Week in a Calcutta Theatre: US 'Atrocities' in Vietnam," *New York Times* 21 Dec, 1966, and Joseph Lelyveld, "Play in Calcutta stages uprising," *New York Times* 7 April, 1968.

¹⁵ A. J. Gunawardane, "Theatre as Weapon: An Interview with Utpal Dutt," *The Drama Review: TDR* (Spring, 1971): 224-237.

one language to another,” or “on intercultural theatre practices.”¹⁶ My dissertation signals a shift in this relationship by reading translation *in* rather than *of* a text. Through a comparative study of a group of contemporary plays from India, Ireland, Nigeria, and Britain that have rarely been read together, I demonstrate how a reading of translation as dramatic technique disrupts a constitutive monolingualism that seems to condition the reception of drama and theatre. I take the late-nineteen sixties as a point of departure. I look at plays that appear with and respond to the shifting trajectory of radical politics in different global locations. Translation as it is figured in the plays also allows me to examine the category of the ‘political’ in political theatre. The second wave of decolonization movements in Asia and Africa frame the different imaginations of collectivity I trace in these texts. The beginnings of new social movements in the sixties and the emergence of the post-communist condition in the nineties productively supplement this framework. Contemporary theories of translation, drawing upon a critical genealogy that can be traced back at least to Walter Benjamin’s influential 1923 essay, “The Task of the Translator,”¹⁷ often conceptualize translation within the ethical double bind of a “impossible necessity” – “the impossibility of fully rendering another’s voice or meaning, and yet the necessity of making the attempt.”¹⁸ I attempt to locate moments in these texts where such an understanding of translation provides a model

¹⁶ Jenny Spencer, “Performing Translation in Contemporary Anglo American Drama,” *Theatre Journal* 59 (2007), 391.

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968).

¹⁸ Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood, “The Ethics of Translation,” in Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood ed. *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 89.

for thinking about emergent, alternative configurations of collectivity. A key constituent of the political that has become somewhat marginalized in current discussions of identity and difference, the notion of the 'collective subject' might then be understood on this model as being incomplete but nevertheless expedient.

The nineteen-sixties also hold a second significance for the periodization of my project. On the one hand, it was in 1966, nearly forty years ago, that Richard Schechner declared in the pages of *The Tulane Drama Review*: "The literary model is passing away and it is being replaced by a performance model whose shape happily, is not yet fixed."¹⁹ This initially proved to be a productive displacement given the perceived hegemony of the text, clearing the space for performance to emerge as a contending cultural form; however, the unquestioned merits of that transformation have come under critical scrutiny as disciplinary orientations now warrant a reassessment of the anti-text, and by extension, anti-literary stance that has informed theatre and performance studies in the last few decades.²⁰ Performance theorist Marvin Carlson, in fact, concludes in his recent book that, "In the excitement and stimulation of this new orientation, however, certain more traditional areas of concern have been neglected...The long-standing theoretical privileging of the dramatic text was largely replaced by an attention to nonlinguistic and especially nonliterary phenomena.

¹⁹ Richard Schechner, "The New Look" *The Tulane Drama Review* 11.1 (1966), 22-23.

²⁰ I have in mind particularly the work of Julie Peters, *The Theatre of the Book, 1480-1880: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), and W.B. Worthen, *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), but also Jody Enders' slightly earlier book, *Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Language in the theatre, once a central theoretical concern, was generally relegated to a distinctly minor position.”²¹ I would like to supplement that position by arguing that the question of language in revisiting the text of drama in the age of ‘world literature’ and globalized postcoloniality now needs to be posed as the question of multilingualism that is either literally or figuratively present in the text. It is in this context that translation, figured as the dramatic technique of a play, functions as a critical intervention. If, as outlined in a recent editorial agenda in the journal *Modern Drama*, “the appropriation of theatrical terms for literary criticism of non-theatrical genres [now] also presents an opportunity for critical work specifically on drama....,” then I would like to situate my work within that trajectory, always mindful of but not necessarily privileging performance at the expense of the text in so far as such a distinction can be consistently sustained.²² In the rest of this article, I would attempt to elaborate some of the above mentioned issues through a close reading of a postcolonial Bengali play *Teer* [The Arrow] (1967) by Utpal Dutt, with whom I began. My knowledge of Bengali enables me to extend but also problematize some of the dominant models of reading Anglophone texts when approaching the literature written in the regional languages in the non-metropolitan countries. It is also part of an effort to read the languages of the Global South not merely as field languages but as active literary and

²¹ Marvin Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 1.

²² Alan Ackerman, “The Prompter’s Box: Toward a Close Reading of Modern Drama,” *Modern Drama*, 49:1 (Spring 2006), 5.

cultural media that can supplement existing thinking about postcolonial, comparative and world literatures.

Teer dramatizes the beginnings of a tribal-peasant insurgency in the late-nineteen sixties in the Naxalbari region near Darjeeling in Northern Bengal.²³ For a succinct account of the initial events that are dramatized in the play written soon after, I quote from one of the more authoritative commentaries on that period:

“In May 1967, there was a peasant uprising at Naxalbari – an area in the north-eastern tip of India, bordering Nepal on the west, Sikkim and Bhutan on the north, and then East Pakistan on the south. It was led by armed Communist revolutionaries who were till then members of the Communist Party of India (Marxists), but were later to break away and form their separate party – the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) or CPI (M-L). The uprising was crushed by the police within a few months. But from then on things could never be quite the same in the Indian countryside.”²⁴

Deriving its name from the place where it started (‘Naxalbari’) the insurgency came to be known as the ‘Naxalite’ movement, and eventually spread to many parts of India attracting, in particular, a substantial following among students and urban youth in cities like Calcutta and Delhi. By the early-nineteen seventies, with its growing internal ideological and tactical disagreements, the movement had mostly degenerated into a campaign of unorganized violence, and was summarily suppressed through military

²³ There is an ongoing debate on the correct terminological category for the autochthonous peoples of India, most importantly in relation to their rights and present predicaments. The three terms commonly used are “tribals,” “*adivasis*,” from Sanskrit, meaning “original inhabitants,” and more recently “indigenous peoples.” A recent book that discusses these issues from all perspectives is Bengt G. Karlsson and Tanka B. Subba ed. *Indigeneity in India* (London/New York/Bahrain: Kegan Paul, 2006).

²⁴ Sumanta Banerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalite Movement in India* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980), x.

measures by the state.²⁵ The Naxalite Movement, however, articulated the first significant and violent challenge to the popular legitimacy of the postcolonial Indian state and redirected its attention to the lingering and large-scale problems of social inequality and political self-determination in a newly independent polity. I attempt to read the Naxalite movement as a ‘post-national’ formation whose cultural representations in the work of authors like Dutt map onto the contours of the postcolonial in a way that destabilizes any easy consensus on the latter. The specificity of the postcolonial derived from such a reading, far from being a disadvantage, then helps to preserve its continuing relevance through what Stuart Hall calls “a critical relay through the global” that refuses simplistic binaries between discourses of oppositionality (the national) and plurality (the global).

The most significant point of departure for my reading of the formation of collectivity in *Teer*, however, derives from the fact that the rebellion against the oppressive local landlord-capitalist-government nexus staged in the play is orchestrated by a diverse group of landless peasants, exploited day laborers and tea garden workers belonging mostly to marginalized, autochthonous/tribal (Santal, Oraon) and other minority ethnic populations (Rajbangsi, Nepali, and Rajgond) in the region.²⁶ It is well

²⁵ There now exists an extensive body of research on the Naxalite Movement including the following: Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and Their Ideology* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1988), Edward Duyker, *Tribal Guerillas: The Santals of West Bengal and the Naxalite Movement* (New Yrk: Oxford UP, 1987), Marius Damas, *Approaching Naxalbari* (South Asia Books, 1991), and Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India* (Delhi: Rupa and Co., 2006). One reason for the steady stream of research on the spread and legacy of the movement might very well be the contemporary resurgence of Maoist insurgency in many tribal and impoverished districts of India that now poses a significant political and security challenge to the postcolonial Indian state.

²⁶ For an account of the involvement of tea plantation workers belonging to the different tribes with the Naxalite Movement, see Piya Chatterjee, *A Time for Tea: Women, labor, and Post/Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation* (Durham and London: Duke Univ, Press, 2001), especially “Chapter 8 – Protest,” 289-323.

known that the Naxalite movement had mobilized substantial sections of India's vast autochthonous population as this excerpt from an early report testifies:

The Naxalbari movement has also rescued from the abyss of oblivion and negligence another aspect of our socio-economic life – the fate of the tribal population – and has drawn attention to their revolutionary potential...the primitive custom of bonded labour is still a practice among them. As pointed out earlier the question of organizing the landless has been neglected so long. The tribals who form a major part of them naturally shared the same neglect."²⁷

What is new and interesting about that mobilization, I argue, can be approached through a two-fold reading: first, a 'local' reading that hinges on the text's deployment of substantial mixed-language dialogue juxtaposing the dominant Bengali with marginalized autochthonous languages like Santali and Sadri, and dialects like Rajbangsi;²⁸ second, a 'global' reading that not only takes into the transnational trajectories of Maoism but also complicates the collective subject of the urban, mostly youth-based social movements of the nineteen sixties by introducing autochthonous

²⁷ Sumanta Banerjee, "Naxalbari: Between Yesterday and Tomorrow – II," *Frontier* (May 24, 1969), 10.

²⁸ There is a generally accepted view that the 300-odd Austro-Asiatic ethnic groups in existence in the subcontinent, when the Indo-European speakers moved in in the mid-Second millennium, are the original inhabitants of India. Santals, Oraons and Mundas are among the larger group to be found in certain sections of Eastern India. An empirical corroboration of this language politics can be gauged from the fact that according to the 2001 Census of India, Bengali, along with the cultural capital it commands, is also the second most spoken language in India (at 83 million speakers) compared to a mere 6-million speakers of Santali and much less for the other languages/dialects mentioned in the play. While *Teer* is probably one of the earlier examples of mixed-language drama texts in the sense I argue here, it has not been wholly uncommon in Bengali prose. It has been used by, only to give the example of a writer relatively better known in English translation, Mahasweta Devi in her fiction.

peoples with histories of older and deeper struggles into that formation.²⁹ In the rest of this chapter, my close reading of translation as it is figured in the play would mostly attempt to work out the 'local' reading. Here we need to take note of the fact that the revolutionary training and effort of the autochthonous people in the northern part of the state in the play is sharpened and shaped by some empathetic yet didactic activist intellectuals from the city (Calcutta). In fact, that is one of the reasons why, producing a straightforward critique of the Leninist vanguardist ideology or relatively class-fixed notion of emancipatory politics in the play, while still relevant, will perhaps not be very original.³⁰ As I have already indicated, read as a blueprint of political action, which was also part of the author's conscious position, *Teer* will probably exhibit most of the now familiar limitations inherent in such a politics of representation.³¹ Although Dutt was committed to communist ideals his political sympathies as evident in a career-defining play like *Teer* can be placed within multiple and different varieties of leftist political thought. When asked to comment on his most important theatrical and political influences, Dutt was often reported to have said, "To understand the best of Brecht we need to understand the best of Shakespeare, which is *Hamlet*. And to understand *Hamlet*, we need to understand Lenin." It is therefore not a coincidence that he wrote

²⁹ I further develop this second reading in "Politics and Periodicals in the 1960s: Readings around the 'Naxalite Movement,'" in Samantha Christiansen and Zachary Scarlett, eds. *1968 and the 'Third World,'* (Oxford/New York: Berghahn Books) (forthcoming).

³⁰ See most notably V.I. Lenin, *What is to be done?* trans. Joe Fineberg and George Hanna (New York & London: Penguin, 1989), and for one of its more influential critiques, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

³¹ For the playwright's self-positioning, see Dutt, *Towards a Revolutionary Theatre* (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, 1982), 73-90, and "Theatre as Weapon: An Interview with Utpal Dutt," *TDR* (Spring, 1971): 224-237.

one of the first socialist interpretations of Shakespeare in Bengali – *Shakespearer samaj chetana* [Shakespeare’s social consciousness] – which brought together his theoretical insights on theatre gained from the experience of performing classic Shakespearean tragedies like *Macbeth* in front of ‘mass’ and often semi-literate audiences in rural Bengal.³² This experience also marked Dutt’s turn to Bengali ‘jatra,’ re-casting his previous, mostly-urban political theatre practice in the mode of that commercial form of theatre in the round once hugely popular in the villages and small towns in many parts of Eastern India. Dutt’s politics were of an unreconstructed Marxist, a lifelong supporter of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)/CPI(M), which was also democratically elected to and remained in power in his home state of West Bengal during most of his theatrical career (1977-2010). However, reading a relatively early play like *Teer*, which had controversially endeared him to the more radical (and eventually break away) Marxist-Leninist faction of the CPI(M), we might be tempted to situate him rather than locating a direct influence, for instance, within the once vibrant tradition of Marxist thought that was critical and positively suspicious of parliamentary politics espoused by theorists such as Rosa Luxemburg.³³ On the other hand, Dutt’s staging of translation as a dramatic resolution to the ethical-political problem of difference posed by the multilingual nature of his favored revolutionary constituency (the small peasants and tea plantation workers belonging to various marginalized autochthonous and ethnic populations) was born out of his political investment in the idea of a viable collective

³² See Utpal Dutt, *Shakespearer Samaj Chetana* (Calcutta: M C Sarkar, 1972).

³³ See Rosa Luxemburg, “Parliamentarism and Social Democracy,” (1904).

political subject led by a visionary even if emergent leadership. The latter tendency, along with his increasingly pronounced admiration for Lenin's political thought and method, would then align him with what has been the dominant interpretation of the idea of a vanguard in the form of the revolutionary party.³⁴

The presence of multiple languages in the text of *Teer* can also be read as a problem of verisimilitude, of fidelity to a persistent realism in the theatre, but as I attempt to show, the text does not entirely bear it out. The playwright's political empathy, on the other hand, can be succinctly characterized in terms of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies as "[t]he ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern [that] is the left-intellectual's stock-in trade," but once³⁵ we accept and move beyond this political reading we can focus our attention on how the dramatic technique of the play organizes the text to this purpose. Hence, I propose a reading of *Teer* that turns upon a close attention to the limits and openings of how translation, as an attempt to negotiate the heterolinguality of political articulation figured in the text of the play³⁶.

It is perhaps not surprising that *Teer* presents itself primarily as agitprop theatre, and true to its purpose, attempts to mobilize a revolutionary collectivity through

³⁴ Lenin, "What is to be done?" I deliberately mention 'dominant interpretations' of Lenin's concept of vanguardism and the party so as to draw attention to recent re-readings of "What is to be done?" by Lars T. Lih among others. In *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to be done? In Context* (Boston: Brill, 2005), Lih pays meticulous attention to the translation of hard-to-translate key terms in Russian and argues that misreadings of that important and founding text of vanguardist politics might very well have been a product of cold war mythmaking on the one hand and Stalinist appropriation on the other resulting in a portrayal of Lenin's theory of organized workers as singularly undemocratic.

³⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge & London.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 255.

³⁶ A drama text is always transformed in performance, and I will supplement a close reading of the literary text with the play's available performance history in order to generate a fuller perspective.

directly, even crudely, conveying its ‘message.’ Its politics, of necessity, appears doctrinaire. The plot contains melodramatic elements embodied, for instance, in stock figures of the oppressive *jotedar*, the landlord, who is satirized, and the brutal police officer as his accomplice, who is demonized. The stagecraft, largely ignored in the play’s contemporary critical reception, was nevertheless eclectic resulting in a mélange of Piscatorian expressionism, Brechtian epic style, Soviet agitprop, documentary theatre and the popular idiom of the Bengali *jatra*.³⁷ The fraught question of its implied audience, however, can be most productively engaged through a reading of the politics of language staged through the play’s dramatic strategy understood in terms of translation.³⁸ The play also had a controversial performance history, which as I have briefly mentioned, can be mostly attributed to the conflicted nature of the author’s political self-positioning at a time of dramatic shifts within Indian communist party politics in the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet split in international communism (which I will shortly discuss), with the unhappy result that the controversy came to mark most of the play’s critical reception.³⁹

³⁷ See Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theatre* (New York: Avon Books, 1963), Peter Weiss, “Fourteen Propositions for a Documentary Theatre,” *World Theatre* 17 (1968) and “The Material and the Models: Notes towards a Definition of Documentary Theatre,” *Theatre Quarterly* 1/1 (1971), and Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

³⁸ One version of Dutt’s own account of what he expected the play to do for its audience can be found in “Theatre as Weapon: An Interview with Utpal Dutt,” *TDR* (Spring, 1971): 224-237.

³⁹ As an example of the response in Bengali literary criticism, see Pabitra Sarkar, “Little Theatre Group projojito Teer,” [The Little Theatre Group’s production of ‘Teer’], *Abhinaya Darpan* quoted in Nirmal Ghosh, *Naxalbadi Andolan o Bangla Sahitya* [The Naxalite Movement and Bengali Literature] (Kolkata: Karuna Prakashani, 1980) 92-107. Along with newspaper reports this was also the general impression conveyed in my interviews with Dutt’s wife and daughter, and cultural critic and commentator Samik Bandyopadhyay among other theatre practitioners and critics in Calcutta and Delhi who have closely followed Dutt’s career.

Teer, in fact, opens as/in a scene of translation. The opening scene is titled ‘*Prostbonā*’, a ‘Prologue,’ or ‘Proposition’ in a more literal translation. Dutt resorts to this slightly uncharacteristic practice of providing a single-word or concisely phrased title at the head of each scene that either summarizes or signals the action about to be dramatized for the first eleven of the fifteen scenes in the play, for example, ‘*Bibāha*’ [‘The Wedding’], ‘*Vote Mantra* [The Election Chant],’ ‘*Raktey bonā dhān* [Paddy sown in blood], *Janatar Pulish* [The People’s Police] etc. We can anticipate from these examples that while all the titles have a somewhat synecdochal function some were more ironic than others given the play’s attempt to articulate a trenchant critique of what appeared to Dutt as the unmistakably bourgeois character of the postcolonial Indian state. On the other hand, given the influence of Brecht on his dramaturgy, it is possible to read this move in at least two ways: as Dutt’s attempt to somewhat de-emphasize the traditional importance of plot in favor of the politics through the use of certain epic theatrical stage practices and/or, as a more obvious device of Brechtian defamiliarization.⁴⁰ I should perhaps also mention that the title of the play – ‘*Teer*,’ which is the Bengali word for ‘arrow’ (also sometimes called *bān* in dialectal variations in the text) – is itself an iconic usage of the word deriving from the long association of the ‘arrow’ with tribal-peasant militancy both in India and elsewhere in the world.⁴¹ Here, I fashion my reading after

⁴⁰ The scene titles, interestingly, disappear and are replaced by numbers after a crucial turn of events in the play (Scene 11), namely the brutal police firing on a group of villagers killing six women and two children. The actual events took place in Prasadjote village, on May 25, 1967, thus precipitating the retaliation by the tribal-peasants.

⁴¹ Mahasweta Devi’s novella *Chotti Munda o tar Teer* (1980) translated as *Chotti Munda and his Arrow* (Blackwell, 2003) by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak would be another illustration of such iconic usage. Also see Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1965).

the manner of Ranajit Guha's discussion of "nonverbal transmitters used for the propagation of insurgency" in his influential book on the history and nature of peasant insurgency.⁴² Tracing the journey of the 'sign of the arrow' through various eighteenth and nineteenth century peasant uprisings in colonial India, Guha asserts, "Its ["the arrow of war"] role as a means of rebel mobilization was made widely known...The pressure of insurgent mobilization appears thus to have helped a sign to extend its domain beyond its traditional boundaries."⁴³ In the case of *Teer*, it is not the real world possibility of seizing state power with the help of primitive weapons but the rhetorical work of the figure of an arrow, a *teer*, in the title of Dutt's play that calls for a careful translation by the sympathetic reader in so far as it pre-figures the political in the text.

What follows is an extended excerpt from the opening scene of *Teer* along with Dutt's stage directions in parentheses⁴⁴:

Proposition/Prologue [Scene 1]

A procession of people walk out on the stage, led by the tall, statuesque figure of Sukra Tudu, ceremoniously beating the [traditional folk] drum [mādol] – Birsa and Gajua Oraon behind him, with the red flag...followed by Sanjho Orain and Somari, and then the rest; The procession is armed with all kinds of weapons – spears, bows and arrows etc. They are raising

⁴² Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁴³ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 233-34.

⁴⁴ I have translated all the Bengali dialogues into English. In an attempt to recreate a semblance of the mixed-language texture of the original script, I have only phonetically transcribed the autochthonous words and expressions without providing their English translations.

slogans.

(Addressing the audience)

Sukra: *We* [*Āmra*] are many *jātis* – I am Sukra Tudu, I am a farm worker
[*khetmajur*];⁴⁵ I also work on the tea plantation...*We* are Santal...

Gabriel: Gabriel Santal, farm worker;

Birsa: I am Birsa, he's Gajua...this is Sanicharoa...*We* are Oraon.

Sanjho Orain here is my...my...

Sanjho: Aahe buda, kaiyme khon lukaal keya rey? (laughter)

Birsa: Toho dinda moho dinda saiya! (laughter)

This obstinate woman is my wife. This is Manglu, our son. And
this one's Gangi, my sister. She got marr'd [eke biyo korecchhe...]-

Sukra: It's not marr'd, married, married [biyo noy, biye, biye...]

Birsa: Yes, she got married to Gajua- Tutli maatiya ta bhisala natiya
piyaak le chale Ganga kinar-

Gajua: Jotala khetey mala murga chhaare debe ho –

It is precisely at this point that Sukra, the bilingual *sutradhara*/narrator figure who was also leading the procession, hurriedly intervenes, pleading with everyone to speak in Bengali:

Sukra: Bengali, you have to speak in Bengali; or else no one will be able to
understand anything...(to the audience) Tell me, what's the point of

⁴⁵ All italicizations of 'We' in this extract are mine.

speaking in Sadri? This is Upasu Singh; He's Rajbangsi...Here's
Somari...she's also a Rajbangsi...beauty--

Since Somari and Upasu, unaffected by Sukra's pleading, seem to carry on with their conversation in the dialectal Rajbangsi, Sukra impatiently intervenes again exhorting his fellow tribals:

Sukra: What a problem! Bengali – you have to speak in straightforward Bengali [*shojā Bānglā*] – or else who's going to understand anything? (beats his drum)

Finally, his impassioned plea seems to work, Birsa takes the lead:

Birsa: “*We [Āmra]* are of different stripes. *We* live in the Naxalbari *thāna* [precinct] of Darjeeling district. In and around Prasad village *we* are many...

Ranbahadur: I am Nepali--

Gajua: Oraon--

Upasu: Rajbangsi

Gabriel: Santal--

Someone: Bengali –

A third: Rajgond –

Sukra: (stopping his drum) ...but all our differences are
erased...the different shades of our skin mix and wash away
in the sweat of our laboring bodies... the landlord and the
sarkar [the government], they don't differentiate between us

- what caste has the oppressed? *We* [*Āmra*] are all peasants
 [*krishak*] ...⁴⁶

Some of my most important arguments are staged in this crucial opening scene. To start with, what takes place in the above excerpt is not just a staging of translation but also, I would argue, translation setting the stage for the enactment of the text. Here the politics of language in a postcolonial text becomes twice removed, transposed from the familiar fraught relationship between the colonial dominant (English) and the subordinated native language (Bengali) to a scene of internal colonization under the regime of the postcolonial: hegemonic Bengali (the language of governance and cultural transactions in the state of West Bengal) and its marginalized autochthonous other Santali, Sadri and Rajbangsi. For the autochthonous subject to be able to articulate (and be heard?) future political demands in Bengali this semblance of the collective ‘We’ of “We are all peasants...” arrived at through the dramatization of translation in the above scene will therefore need to be preserved in the text. As we see in this instance and repeatedly throughout the text, the figure of Sukra Tudu, the bilingual narrator/*sutradhara* comes to stand in for the figure of the translator. And, I will argue, translation as it is figured in this opening scene comes to frame the play text and condition the possibility of its being read and performed. This textual strategy of translation, particularly when employed by the narrator figure Sukra Tudu, who occupies the liminal space at the margins of the dramatic text and the stage (but also in

⁴⁶ *Teer* in Utpal Dutt, *Natakasamgra, Vol 3* [Collected Works, Vol 3] (Calcutta: Mitra o Ghosh Publishers, 1995), 217-18.

the figure of Birsa who takes the lead, and eventually everyone else), is thus normalized into the play text through an act of subsumption that is comparable with the act of domestication of a foreign text in literary translation.⁴⁷ It is in foreclosing this originary act of translation that constitutes the 'We' of the Santals, Oraons, and Rajbangsis, in holding this originary heterogeneity in abeyance, that the ideological interpellation in the rest of the play can be staged. It is important that this articulation of collectivity is figured early on since immediately after the introductions, we are introduced to two new characters – Debidas and Siben Ray – whose caste-Hindu names could be an indicator to the native speaker of their privileged outsider status in the tribal gathering. Debidas, who comes across as comfortably bilingual in Bengali and Santali, is shown to share a very warm relationship with the tribal population. Siben, on the other hand, is a friend of Debidas and a potential election candidate for the Communist Party (the CPI-M), who arrives with the promise of revolutionary reforms once his party is elected in power. The eventual failure of the CPI (M) to fulfill these promises will bring about a split in the party, and subsequently alienate the faction which would be instrumental in the Naxalbari uprising.

An interesting double injunction is figured in Sukra's exhortation to his fellow tribals to speak in '*shojā Bangla*' in the above scene, which can be translated as 'straightforward Bengali,' one meaning of the Bengali word *shojā* being 'straight.' However, while it refers to the common spoken variety of the language (invariably

⁴⁷ Lawrence Venuti discusses the domestication/foreignization problem in translation in his *The Translator's Invisibility* (London & NY: Routledge, 1995) and *The Scandals of Translation* (London & NY: Routledge, 1998).

marked by geography and class locations) on one register, we can also read an assumption underlying the perpetual effort to “straighten the curve (the impossibility of straightforward access)” – “*courbure* into *droiture*” – to bridge the fundamental impossibility of direct communication with the other. This impossibility, described in the law of the social, that we cannot address/access our intended listener in a *straight* line [*shojā*] that guarantees perfect comprehension but makes possible the sustained effort for any appeal to be heard, any collectivity to be imagined.⁴⁸

My contention is that the empathetic radical playwright, perhaps aware of his ventriloquizing of the postcolonial autochthonous subject, turns to translation as a strategy of dramatic resolution. It is a move that we are able to read as ironic only in retrospect, and upon which is predicated the successful constitution of a collectivity in the text. Even if we venture to read this desire for translation as dramatic strategy, as “a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self” complete with the theatrical trope, the working out of the mimetic mode in the text seems to belie the originary responsibility.⁴⁹ This situation warrants a discussion about the nature of translation as a ‘social relation’ that might be modeled upon a reading of the ways in which translation is figured in the literary text.⁵⁰ If, as some recent developments in translation studies have argued, translation is to be conceptualized as an “impossible

⁴⁸ Spivak (2003) and Spivak, “Schmitt and Poststructuralism: A Response,” *Cardozo Law Review*, 21-5-6 (May 2006), 1727.

⁴⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Politics of Translation” in Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips eds. *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 177.

⁵⁰ See Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

necessity" that is always unfinished, never adequate to the task, then I would argue that the constitution of collectivity in the text of *Teer*, figured in and modeled upon translation, while imperative also comes undone. Lawrence Venuti admits the unfinished business of (literary) translation when he remarks that, "[I]mplicit in any translation is the hope for a consensus, a communication and recognition of the foreign text through a domestic inscription. Yet the inscription can never be so comprehensive, so total in relation to domestic constituencies, as to create a community of interest without exclusion or hierarchy."⁵¹ Jonathan Abel, building upon Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of a 'literary communism' however, argues for "viewing translation as community" where the identities of translated and translation stand in an equal and equivalent relationship.⁵² Such scenarios, enabling as they are, become complicated when dealing with languages in postcoloniality that exist in a relationship that is so historically inflected by an imbalance of power that one must exercise maximum caution in projecting an emancipatory dimension onto them. While *Teer* seems to stage this '(translation as) necessity' as part of the homogenizing effort to articulate a unitary political subject in the play, it nevertheless wavers in its staging of the 'impossibility (of translation)' that would require retaining the heterolingual nature of that political articulation and thereby act as a deterrent to the radical playwright's desire to stage a revolutionary collectivity. The play's investment in dramatizing a climactic class-for-

⁵¹ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader* (London & New York: 1999), 485.

⁵² Jonathan E. Abel, "Translation as Community: The Opacity of Modernizations of *Genji Monogatari*," in Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood eds. *Nation, language and the Ethics of Translation* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press), 148.

itself act of *successful* rebellion by tribal-peasants at the end seems to contribute to this necessary failure.

The logic of a certain political expediency or even dramatic form can offer possible explanations of *Teer's* attempt to decisively negotiate this non-negotiable double bind 'necessity/ impossibility.' Here, a brief digression to outline the developments in Indian communism that would be the likely cause of this political expediency might be helpful. In what follows, I try to provide a summary of these developments as they relate to the play.⁵³ Internal ideological tensions in the Communist Party of India (CPI) were already evident during the Indo-China conflict in 1962. The most immediate effect of a larger conflict of loyalties eventually manifest itself in the formation of the 'leftist' Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] in 1964, breaking away from the original ('rightist') CPI formed in 1920. A common element of the tactical lines of both the parties, however, was the emphasis on "peaceful means" for achieving either a "national democratic revolution" or a "people's democracy" in the country. The CPI (M) participated in West Bengal state elections in 1967 and won on the promise of major land reforms – probably the most important aspect of the Indian polity – benefitting landless peasants and sharecroppers. It was only after the CPI (M) had formed an United Front government with the Congress party, by then reduced to a minority in the state (although in power in the federal government), however, that they

⁵³ Apart from Banerjee (1980), I found the following texts very useful in constructing this narrative: Mohan Ram, *Maoism in India* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), Asish Kumar Roy, *The Spring Thunder and After: A Survey of the Maoist and Ultra-Leftist Movements in India, 1962-75* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1975), Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and their Ideology* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), and Partha Chatterjee, *The Present History of West Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

realized the difficulty of overcoming constitutional and bureaucratic constraints in the way of such large scale land redistribution, and started showing signs of betraying its electoral promise. Consequently, the more radical party members, becoming increasingly disillusioned with what they saw as the CPI(M)'s inaction and compromise, gravitated towards prominent dissidents like Charu Mazumdar who openly criticized the parties' "revisionist" tendencies and started advocating a strategy of "seizure of state power through armed struggle" modeled on the ideas of Mao Zedong.⁵⁴ The motivations behind such a move can be better understood in view of Mao's approval of Lin Piao's call for a people's war based on guerilla tactics and rural bases in the 'the Third World,' during the Eleventh Plenary Session of the CPC Central Committee in August 1966.⁵⁵ Mazumdar, who had been active in organizing dissident communist factions in his native North Bengal for some time thus became the main ideologue behind the uprising in Naxalbari in May 1967. In retrospect, it became clear that a local, CPI (M) members-led tribal peasant struggle in the region "had developed since the early 1950s, but attained a new level of organization and militancy when it was programmatically linked with the struggles of tea plantation workers in the

⁵⁴ By some accounts, the events of the communist-led armed peasant rebellion in Telengana in the erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad in southern India in 1946-51, was the earliest example of the application of Maoist revolutionary strategies and even predated the final victory of Maoism in China itself, thereby leaving a precedent in Indian Maoism.

⁵⁵ For Lin Piao's thesis see "Long Live The Victory of People's War," *Peking Review*, 3 (September, 1965). The Naxalbari uprising also received immediate recognition from the Chinese Communist Party, hailing them as the truly revolutionary faction in India. The message was put out through Peking Radio broadcasts and editorials in the People's Daily and Peking Review. See for example, *Peking Review* 29 (July 14, 1967), *Peking Review* 33 August 11, 1967 and *Peking Review* 39 (September 22, 1967).

neighbouring gardens.”⁵⁶ This pro-Naxalbari faction of the CPI (M) would eventually split to form the third communist party in India – the CPI (Marxist-Leninist)/CPI (M-L) in 1969. They would go on to organize the Naxalite movement, which at its peak also enjoyed widespread support among students and youth in many states in India, only to degenerate into a campaign of unorganized violence, to be finally brutally repressed by the state by the mid-1970s.

Utpal Dutt had consistently adhered to the ‘leftwing’ of the Indian communist movement, and thus became quickly predisposed towards the CPI (M-L) and its Maoist ideas. Since *Teer* was written and performed during the years of intense political chaos and indirection between the Naxalbari uprising (1967) and the actual formation of the CPI (M-L) in 1969, the controversy arose due to two reasons: the unease of the CPI (M) with a powerful propagandist like Dutt’s support for the militant movement on the one hand and the displeasure of the Maoists on the other, accusing him, among other things of limiting the play’s politics to merely liberal democratic demands. As Dutt put it in a 1972 interview with theatre critic Samik Bandyopadhyay, published in the New Delhi-based theatre journal *Enact*:

“What you said about *Teer* is absolutely right. The CPI (M) did not accept the point of view of *Teer*; they even came to condemn the Naxalbari movement. But when we first staged *Teer*, they hadn’t decided on a line...But once they had a clearly marked line, they disowned us. On the other hand, the new Party that came up with the Naxalbari movement was bent against the Cultural Front from the beginning...they were all

⁵⁶ Chatterjee, (1997), 87.

convinced that the theatre was a diversion to occupy the minds of the best city cadre...We had to go on performing *Teer* without support from any political Party.”⁵⁷

Added to this was the fact that Dutt was arrested on charges of involvement with militant anti-national activities with the appearance of *Teer*, only to be released soon after. The controversy picked up again following his release, when it was widely rumored that Dutt had disgraced himself by agreeing to sign a document that would restrict him from getting involved in political agitation for the next six months. Another version of the story was that 20th Century Fox and Merchant Ivory, in whose film *The Guru* (1969) Dutt was then contracted to act, brokered his release with the federal government with some help from the famous Indian film maker Satyajit Ray.⁵⁸ In later years Dutt regretted both his uncritical support for the CPI (M-L) brand of “adventurist” politics and his trenchant criticism of the parliamentary left as dramatized in *Teer*, and eventually realigned his sympathies with the ruling CPI (M) in West Bengal (which was finally voted out last year after an unbroken thirty years rule as the party in power in the state).⁵⁹ He, however, held on to the conviction that the dramatization of the tribal-peasants’ heroic resistance was undoubtedly fitting for a revolutionary theatre.⁶⁰ Perhaps, such acts would have evoked a comparable reaction in

⁵⁷ Bandyopadhyay, *Enact* 68-69 (Aug-Sep, 1972).

⁵⁸ See, for instance, Gowri Ramnarayan, “Dream Merchant” *The Hindu* 5 June, 2005.

⁵⁹ Utpal Dutt, *Towards a Revolutionary Theatre* (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, 1982), 73-90.

⁶⁰ “Theatre as Weapon: An Interview with Utpal Dutt,” *The Drama Review: TDR* (Spring, 1971).

any of the more politically galvanized parts of the world, where, during the late-nineteen sixties, ideological battle lines were as sharply drawn?

I argue, however, that it is the playwright's dramatic strategy of figuring translation in the play text to (anxiously) *cover over* the act of ignoring subaltern speech that eventually enables the hegemonic political task of constituting a collectivity. In the end, not to repeat, entirely, a gesture of producing an alternative reading that differently reopens what is nevertheless a site of abiding failure, I look towards Brent Edwards' refreshing characterization of such strategic use of translation (he is theorizing Black Internationalism in terms of translation), "best described *not as predetermined failure* but as the rich complexity of a modern cultural practice." (italics mine).⁶¹

Let us go back once more to the opening scene and our discussion of collectivity. I have left the Bengali word *jāti* untranslated in the above excerpt from the opening scene of *Teer*. As the collective predicate of the plural personal pronoun 'We' [*āmra*] in "We are many *jātis*," *jāti* carries a wide range of available meanings in Bengali and any modern Indian language with no exact equivalent in translation. In *The Nation and Its Fragments* Partha Chatterjee argues that, "[I]dentities and solidarities within the language of *jāti* are contextually defined. The language affords the possibility of imagining new bonds of affinity, but it does this precisely by imposing restriction on their free flow...it is political discourse of the "modern" kind which insist that these

⁶¹ Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 22.

collectivities have a fixed, determinate form, and if there are several to which an individual can belong, that there be a priority among them..."⁶² In light of this argument, it might then be possible to read the dramatic movement from the 'We' of "We are many *jātis*" at the beginning of the scene to the "We" of "We are all peasants" articulated in the interest of carrying out a Maoist rebellion, as the gradual consolidation of a unified "modern" political subjectivity through the sublation of a primordial, indeterminate collectivity. That seems to be the burden of translation as it is figured in the text, but if translation reveals itself to be famously unreliable and always incomplete then it probably also destabilizes the revolutionary 'We' in the play.

My argument about the significance of staging the translation of Sadri/Santali/Rajbangsi into Bengali in the dialogic text within the opening lines of the play in order to figure a consensual language of political articulation is further corroborated by a reading of the manuscript of *Teer*.⁶³ We notice that parts of dialogue which prefigure an already organized collectivity of tribal-peasants asserting their politics using a colloquial Bengali – for instance, a series of slogans just after the opening stage directions, expressing their allegiance to Mao Zedong, the Viet Cong etc.– have been struck out in the manuscript. Evidently, Dutt intended the constitution of collectivity to be figured dialogically, mediated by the use of a strategy of translation. The rhetoric of his dramatic language however ended up disrupting and exceeding its logic opening up the unintended consequences of staging the politics of language for a

⁶² Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1995), 222.

⁶³ *Teer* MS from Utpal Dutt Foundation for International Theatre Studies Library, Calcutta.

subversive reading. The articulation of the autochthonous 'We' was followed in the manuscript by a second staging of the attempt to negotiate and overcome the unmanageable heterolinguality of the address – this time in the extended invocation in different languages of a martyr in the ongoing struggle of the tribals against local tea-plantation owners, asserting that his name (Birey Pradhan, a Nepalese) spells the same in all of them. This section, again excised from the printed edition, makes a similar move to dramatize a consensual translation into Bengali as the transparent medium of articulation for the tribal people.

For a gloss on the early usage of the word 'comrade' by Gajua Oraon, Sukra Tudu and some of the other Santali and Rajbangsi speakers, seemingly predating their 'education' in the thought of Mao, Lenin et al in the play, or even Jonaku's response – "This must be Chairman Mao Zedong?" – on being first shown a book with Mao's picture by his enlightened wife Debari, I fall back on Spivak's astute reading of a similar occurrence in Mahasweta Devi's short story Draupadi: "Given the nature of the struggle, there is nothing bizarre in ["Comrade"]. It is part of the undoing of opposites – intellectual-rural, tribalist-internationalist – that is the wavering constitution of "the underground," "the wrong side" of the law."⁶⁴

Throughout the entire first scene the supposedly unruly conduct of the tribal tongues is repeatedly staged and censured, thus legitimizing their supplanting with 'proper' Bengali. The contrast is most effectively figured in the tribal people's attempt to

⁶⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London & New York: Routledge, 1987), 185.

inform the urbane politician Siben Ray of their everyday travails. Upasu Singh's attempt to narrate – the speaker being anyway repeatedly reproached for using an idiosyncratic, idiomatic colloquialized dialect of Rajbangsi, another interesting linguistic disruption of the text – is severely censured by Birsa, one of the prominent bilingual and therefore more amenable characters: “That'll do it! Nothing can salvage our honor now! Do you hear his language?” and then Ranbahadur, the ex-Gurkha Regiment man: “Stop! Don't you dare speak in such rustic tongues here! He'll [Siben] be insulted!” The irony comes full circle when Siben, the urban activist offering promises of land reforms to the landless peasants fails to understand something as fundamental to a peasant insurgency as the measure of a landholding:

Siben: What's a *hāl*?

Ranbahadur: One *hāl* equals seventeen *bighās*. So, you see, the guy [the *jotedar*, the landlord] owns more than two thousand *bighās* of land, but the law apparently states that...⁶⁵

This scene also signals the operation of translation on another register in the text. In what I will call 'ethnographic dramaturgy,' the dialogic text constantly incorporates the translation/explanation of such information (as in the above example) – not unlike the glossaries appended to an earlier generation of English fiction from and about India – and not merely for the education of the sympathetic urban intellectual in the play. It was perhaps also directed to the urban audience in the auditorium, some of whom might attempt to either unlearn or marry his/her 'theory' of revolution with 'practice'

⁶⁵ Teer (1995), 221.

in the field. This is why the question of the reader/audience for *Teer* becomes complicated: who is the addressee of this multilingual (dramatic) revolutionary tract, produced to accomplish strategic needs in the heat of the political moment? It is here that translation again becomes essential in negotiating the conventions of stage realism, the ethical attempt 'to give voice to the marginalized tribal' *in her own language* on the one hand, and the political necessity and obligation to communicate with the (hegemonic, Bengali speaking) urban intellectual who is also in a way being interpellated by the play. On such a reading Dutt's detailed stage directions take on a different status in the text in so far as they figure annotations about the customs, rituals, practices etc of the tribal people. For example, "[Sanjho brings puffed rice for Siben in a bowl-shaped vessel. *Such vessels are called dhēki*]" or the long description accompanying a Rajbangsi wedding ceremony in the "Wedding Scene" between Jonaku and Debari later in the play. The more fascinating examples are from the moments when the text of stage directions itself incorporates an imperative to translate, most often by the bilingual narrator/translator figure of Sukra Tudu but also others. This corroborates what I have been trying to argue about the work of translation in structuring the dialogue of the play on the one hand and enabling a direct address to the audience on the other, where the political relationship between the 'spoken for' and the 'spoken to' are doubly complicated due to linguistic differences. Let us look at the scene that dramatizes the celebration of the victory of Siben's party, the CPI (M), among the tribals, for instance:

Atneswari: (looking into the horizon) Kāl sājhi nāgichey!

Sukra: (translating) Dawn is breaking!

Atneswari: Ātor āndhar konkonai! Uttor pakhey pahārer mathot
byalar chhatta nāgichey. Pahārer mathot borofer dheep odot nal
dekhāchhe!

Sukra: The darkness of the night's gone. The sun's rays are shining on the
mountain tops in the north...the snow peaks are turning
crimson.⁶⁶

What is revealed in such moments is not only the persistence of the figure of translation in the text, this scene occurring much later in the play but more surprisingly, the reappearance of the autochthonous Rajbangsi speech. It interestingly contradicts what we were led to believe at the very beginning of the play: that the political problem of heterogeneous tribal articulations had been resolved once and for all by staging the mutual consent to translate them into hegemonic Bengali in the interest of 'being heard.' The fact that the play, however, continues to inscribe what it began by trying to resolve and overcome - something like what Martin Puchner calls "endorsed substitution" in a slightly different context - can then have consequences for a rethinking of the constitution of dialogue in a dramatic text.⁶⁷

A brilliant example of how *Teer's* translational dramaturgy pre/figures a crucial scene of ideological interpellation of a revolutionary tribal-peasant collectivity halfway

⁶⁶ *Teer* (1995), 259.

⁶⁷ Puchner, *Stage Fright* (2002), 123. Puchner is discussing the contradictory position of anti-theatricality in Yeats, whereby the author re-directs his resistance to the theatre into a productive force of reform in the former.

into the play is found in the not-so-subtle scene title “The Thoughts of Mao Zedong.”⁶⁸ This is interestingly accomplished through the staging of brief dramatic sequences whereby the incomprehensibility of one half of the listeners in Debidas’s ‘class on the thoughts of Mao’ is humorously but effectively resolved by the translation of those same doctrines through sometimes idiomatic and sometimes analogical Rajbangsi or Santali, by a Gangi or a Sanjho Orain.⁶⁹ The actors are familiar: the sympathetic yet didactic figure of the vanguardist urban intellectual (Debidas), the initially disinclined tribal listener who reveals her ‘native intelligence’ and grasps the principles of guerilla warfare surprisingly quickly (Gangi and Sanjho), and of course, the enlightened interlocutor (Debari) who is finally called upon by Debidas to ‘translate’ Mao to her fellow tribals, or Sanjho Orain who ‘translates’ the formal commands of Ranbahadur, the Nepali ex-soldier, to the others during their ‘military’ exercises etc. It seems such “little theoretical theatre[s]” of interpellation, to borrow Althusser’s expression, are more often than not figured in and constituted by scenes of translation, thereby opening up a way of thinking the formation of “collectivities without necessarily prefabricated contents.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Teer (1995), 262-77.

⁶⁹ Edward Duyker in his empirically accomplished book *Tribal Guerillas: The Santals of West Bengal and the Naxalite Movement* (Oxford, 1987) tries to provide an account of how the Santals could rationalize Naxalite violence within their own culture and history, but writing four years after Ranajit Guha’s epochal book, still remains trapped within a Hobsbawmian idea of the tribals as “primitive rebels.”

⁷⁰ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 174; Spivak (2003), 26. Suzanne Gearhart attempts to articulate a critique on these lines of the assumptions behind Althusser’s idea of interpellation – that the policeman and his hailed subject are assumed to share a language in order for subjectification to happen in “Interpellations: From Althusser to Balibar” in *Discipline and Practice: The (Ir)Resistibility of Theory* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 178-258.

There is a scene later in the play which dramatizes the complicity of the different classes/sections in society, speaking in different tongues about the same objective of exploiting and subjugating the tribal-peasants . A brilliant piece of stagecraft working with little resources, here's a description of how it was staged:

The scene is done with a black curtain across the proscenium where the asbestos would be. Eight flaps appear, each with a face behind representing a point of view reactionary. The faces are lit from below which give a grotesque distortion. The lights flash on and off in various combinations of speech and rhythm. The effect: electric machine controlling news media controlling the people.⁷¹

Sukra Tudu's role as translator is further consolidated, when, in one of the many references to the problems of language, translation and mis/communication in the play, he summarizes this scene as nothing more than "Just a little variation in their language, not much else. It's just that...we didn't get to know."⁷²

I would like to conclude by reading a remarkable eyewitness account of an early performance of *Teer* that might help to recreate some of the performative details of the opening scene that I have been discussing. Since tracking down the production history of a controversial play like *Teer* has not been an easy task, a hand-typed report in English that I found among the Utpal Dutt Papers at the Natya Shodh Sansthan Theatre Archive in Calcutta, promised to be an exciting find. The author of the piece, "The Communist Theatre and Utpal Dutt," happened to be James V. Hatch, well known scholar and curator of African American theatre. It recorded the author's impressions of

⁷¹ Hatch, 5.

⁷² *Teer* (1995), 294.

an evening's performance and includes excerpts from a back stage conversation with the director (Dutt himself).⁷³ Looking past traces of the gritty travelogue and (sometimes) romanticized view of theatre workers in the 'third world,' the significance of Hatch's text, in my reading, lies primarily in being an interesting exercise in comparative drama criticism.⁷⁴ It is as an earlier, perhaps pioneering, attempt to situate Dutt's theatre within a global, comparative framework, from an institutional position of theatre studies within the American academy that Hatch's account holds its strongest appeal for my work. The opening sentence of his narrative gives us a clue about the exact day of his visit – 5 April, 1968:

“Martin Luther King had been shot the day previous to my visit to the Minerva Theatre. The assassination had brought the Communists into the street, displaying their anger before the American Consulate and the USIS offices in Calcutta. It was not an auspicious evening to visit their theatre.”⁷⁵

Production records indicate that *Teer* opened at the Minerva Theatre in Calcutta on 16 December, 1967. It had been running for nearly four months when Hatch arrived. I

⁷³ Hatch's text was all the more interesting given the paucity of documented secondary sources on a play like *Teer*. This is a problem afflicting most research on the Naxalite period since CPI (M-L) publications (1967-72) were declared illegal and were often destroyed by government authorities. Newspaper reports in the mainstream press and some independent publications, wherever preserved, thus become the mainstay of non-academic resources. In my research, however, formal and informal interviews with people who were in some way connected with the writing, staging and reception of *Teer* and are still available to talk, turned out to be very helpful.

⁷⁴ Hatch later published the account as “Left Theatre in India” in *The Nation*, (23 June, 1969). [personal communication with the author]

⁷⁵ All of the following five quotations are from James V. Hatch, “The Communist Theatre of Utpal Dutt.”

would like to quote a few representative excerpts from his account here to substantiate my point about its comparativist thrust:

“Calcutta is the New York City of India – the only city in the “world’s largest democracy” that supports a professional theatre, a city where it is possible to attend a different play every night...”

“The façade of the Minerva theatre is not the Great White Way. Built nearly 150 years ago, its last renovation was in 1923. Inside the house is a two tiered balcony like the small oval opera houses of the last century...”

“Who is Dutt?” asked the editor of the *New York Times*. Most American theatre artists would ask the same. To say he is the leading Shakespearean authority, actor and producer in India is to bring a shrug. Someone will remember that he played the part of the Rajah in James Ivory’s *Shakespeare Wallah*, or the role of the Guru in Ivory’s recent film, *The Guru*.”

“A hulk of a man – like Orson Welles – he has huge ears...wears thick glasses, has a strong mouth, heavy lavender lips, and a deep actor’s voice with precise articulation.”

“Whether Dutt himself is a party member may be as debatable as whether Brecht was one in the 1940s.”

I offer below a juxtaposition of something like an ‘audience record’ of the staging of the opening scene as it might have appeared to the Calcutta theatregoer in early-1968 (mediated through the eyes of a visiting American professor of drama):

“The twilight of the house snapped off. A drum in the rhythms of the tribes in Northern India (Naxalbari) [sic] sounded from the rear of the auditorium...All actors, there were 35 in this cast including 12 women, were unpaid. Teachers, clerks, workers, they gave their time to the theatre and the idea...Suddenly from the rear of the auditorium came the drum, carried by a huge man with bare arms. Following him up the ramp trooped eighteen people from the Calcutta streets whose faces resembled nothing of the masky faces of commercial actors acting. Standing on the apron, the drummer, a *sutradhara* borrowed from the *jatra* tradition, introduced the play. The characters more or less introduced themselves amid a great deal of giggling and confusion.”⁷⁶

The *sutradhara*, less a prescient choric figure than an engaging narrator, which Dutt could have borrowed from the folk tradition of Bengali *jatra* as well as Brecht’s epic theatre, was literally the figure of ‘the holder of the thread’ (Sanskrit *sutra* for thread) – the one who framed and linked the performance, the performer and the audience. The ramp that Hatch mentions in his narrative was a later addition by Dutt’s own Little Theatre Group to the existing Minerva Theatre, turning the strict proscenium into an apron stage during an earlier performance – *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* [A River called Titas] (1964), a stage adaptation of a famous Bengali novel.⁷⁷ It was the beginning of Dutt’s

⁷⁶ Hatch, 4.

⁷⁷ Dutt mentions that the inspiration for this stage improvisation came from watching the theatre of Nikolay Okhlopkov at the Mayakovsky Theatre in Moscow. Okhlopkov, a student of Vsevolod Meyerhold, was one of the first modern directors to experiment with the arena stage in an effort to foster more intimacy between the actors and

attempt to move beyond the confines of the proscenium stage and reach out to the audience, which would culminate in his full-fledged experiments with the Bengali *jatra* (with *Rifle* in 1970), a popular form that was (and on a diminished scale, continues to be) hugely popular in rural Bengal and Bangladesh. In his own words from the *TDR* interview:

Jatra is theatre in the round, and it's very loud. Everything is influenced by sight-lines, visibility, and audibility...the actors have to make themselves visible to a large audience, so the makeup is very heavy and the costumes are very colorful. The gestures and stage business are stylized...[T]here was a character called "*Vivek*" (Conscience") who would enter at particularly dramatic moments...and another conventional device - the *juri* - a group of singers sitting on the edge of the arena throughout the performance.⁷⁸

At the time of *Teer*, Dutt had still not embraced many aspects of the *jatra* but as he later commented:

It was part of my search for an audience, a wider audience, for that is the only way by which an actor or a playwright can really survive, survive emotionally...I was developing in the other direction - from the more intellectual to the more popular...For me it was not so much a conscious

the audience. See Dutt, "Little Theatre o Aami" in *Epic Theatre*, 1977. For *Titas*, see Advaita Mallabarman, *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* and Advaita Mallabarman, *A River called Titas*, trans by Kalpana Bardhan, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁷⁸ "Theatre as a Weapon: An Interview with Utpal Dutt," *The Drama Review*, 15.2 (Spring 1971), 230.

choice as a natural development in which I have been sustained by my ideological commitment.⁷⁹

As I indicated at the beginning of this article, texts like *Teer* in particular and Utpal Dutt's work in general invites us to read and contextualize it within different frames of comparison. To begin with, Dutt's resolute internationalism in his theatre thought and practice situates him in an interesting relationship to most playwrights and theatre workers in post-independence India including Indian writers and dramatists writing in English.⁸⁰ His attempt was to put the postcolonial and an earlier iteration of the global in conversation thereby coming to inhabit both on slightly different and unsettling terms. His apprenticeship in the theatre had begun with the English actor-manager Geoffrey Kendall's traveling troupe "Shakespeareana Theatre Company," performing Shakespeare in small towns and cities in newly independent India in the late-1940s/early-50s – something that left an enduring influence on his craft – but his first brush with radical politics happened when he started working with the left-wing Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA), on extended breaks from his own group.⁸¹ Along with Shakespeare, therefore, were German and Soviet agitprop and Indian folk influences filtered through his experience of performing street theatre with the IPTA, to

⁷⁹ Samik Bandyopadhyay, *Enact* 68-69 (Aug-Sep, 1972).

⁸⁰ Aparna Dharwadker, *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India since 1947* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), provides an accessible account of the different trends in post-1947 Indian theatre across the main literary languages, but concentrating on groups and practitioners based in the bigger cities.

⁸¹ Merchant Ivory's film *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965) was loosely based on the traveling/performing experience of the 'Shakespeareana' troupe.

which was then added Brecht, documentary theatre and eventually the popular Bengali *jatra*. Later, speaking to *TDR* in the seventies, he would thus describe his street theatre experience:

We have learned from the Living Newspaper, guerilla theatre, and other forms abroad and created *Pathanatika* (streetcorner plays), in which a group of actors go to a street corner or a village market and begin playing; the dialogue is in part extemporaneous, using local subjects...the audience gathers automatically."⁸²

Dutt's commitment to the internationalist cause was already evident when, after the Kendalls left for Britain and ideological differences resulted in a fallout with the IPTA, he made a fresh start with his own 'Little Theatre Group' (LTG) with a staging of Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* in 1950.⁸³ LTG had been in existence for nearly three years by then, and troubled by the increasing dissonance between their pursuit of classics in the theatre and the immediate political situation around them, had already staged a critically acclaimed production of *Julius Caesar* (1948) in modern costume, set in Mussolini's Italy. The group's revitalized second phase saw performances of an impressive range of plays which also indicate to some extent the young, radicalizing playwright's search for a committed political-theatrical position: some Ibsen in Bengali, namely *Ghosts* (1951) and *Doll's House* (1951), Tagore's *Bisarjan* [The Sacrifice] (1951), a

⁸² "Theatre as a Weapon: An Interview with Utpal Dutt," *The Drama Review*, 15.2 (Spring 1971), 231.

⁸³ The complete annotated chronology of Dutt's theatre works is given in the Appendix to the seventh and final volume of his collected works – *Natakasamagra. Vol VII* (Calcutta: Mitra & Ghosh Publishers, 1999). I have also looked at a Special Issue of *Epic Theatre* (April 2000), and Dutt's long account of his experience with the LTG in the piece "Little Theatre o Aami," [The Little Theatre and me] *Epic Theatre* (1977) to supplement that information.

lot of Shaw (*Dark Lady of the Sonnets, Androcles and the Lion, Arms and the Man, Mrs. Warren's Profession*) and Shakespeare (*Othello, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Macbeth*) in English. However, increasingly troubled by the dual problems of a niche audience on the one hand, and the limited relevance of the English language to mass audiences in then newly-independent India, LTG decided to henceforth perform only in Bengali.

Dutt really came to be acknowledged as a master theatre innovator in postcolonial Indian theatre with the production of *Angar* [Coals] in 1959, a pro-working class drama about a recent incident of the death of some workers trapped in a flooded coalmine. The phenomenal success of *Angar* was followed by *Kallol* [The sound of the waves](1965), a dramatization and spectacular staging of the Indian naval ratings' mutiny on board the frigate HMIS Talwar of the British Indian navy in 1946. *Kallol*, among many of his other plays, was a bold attempt to recover alternative histories of anti-colonial struggle (in this case of military confrontation as opposed to the dominant narrative of Gandhian civil disobedience). These daring stage experiments, which were to give Dutt enduring fame as a director, were also indebted to the excellent handiwork of Tapas Sen. Sen, working with limited resources and rather crude technology, was eventually to emerge as the foremost expert on stage lighting in Indian theatre. By then, since he had schooled himself in European, radical American and 19th century Bengali theatre traditions, Dutt was also and increasingly, seen as one of the foremost interlocutors of Brecht in India. He set up the 'Brecht Society of India' in Calcutta in 1964, with filmmaker Satyajit Ray as its president, and founded *Epic Theatre*, the Society's bilingual (Bengali/English) journal with Helene Weigel on its advisory

board.⁸⁴ Dutt had also visited the Berliner Ensemble in the mean time, and collaborated with Fritz Bennewitz, director of the *Deutsches Nationaltheater* in Weimar, when he visited India. Well versed in German, French, Latin, and Sanskrit, and a prolific writer in Bengali and English, Dutt also published his first volume of prose writings on the theatre, *Chayer Dhnowa* [Tea Smoke], in 1964, somewhat modeled on the dialogic structure of Brecht's *Messingkauf Dialogues*.⁸⁵ Although he published translations and adaptations of Brecht and sometimes critically assimilated him in his own writings on the theatre, unlike many of his contemporaries, Dutt never performed a Brecht play in his entire career. He believed that Brecht's idiom would not translate well with the Indian audiences and their expectations from theatre. Brechtian influences, however, were intermittently present throughout his eclectic staging practices, and a reading of someone like Dutt can productively supplement a comparative study of theatre and politics in the last fifty years that might take a global 'post-Brecht moment' to be its point of departure.⁸⁶

Read against a dominant trend in post-independence theatre in India, which has

⁸⁴ For a handy reference see Dalmia, (2006), 217.

⁸⁵ Utpal Dutt, *Chayer Dhnowa* [Tea Smoke] (Calcutta: Rupa, 1964). While Dutt had translated some of his Bengali plays into English, there is a now renewed interest in the availability of his works. A recent example is the translation of Dutt's *Manusher Adhikarey* (1968), dramatizing the Scottsboro Trials in 1930s Alabama, as *The Rights of Man* by Sudipto Chatterjee (Calcutta and London: Seagull Books, 2009).

⁸⁶ Loren Kruger's *Post-imperial Brecht* is an example of interesting work in this direction. Laura Bradley engages in a comparative reading of the different productions of Brecht's *Mother* throughout the twentieth century in *Brecht and Political Theatre: The Mother on Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), although her examples are limited to Western Europe and the US east coast. Vasudha Dalmia has recently written on the multiple careers of Brecht in India, if only with the aim of evaluating it as a contribution towards the creation of a national cultural policy in the postcolonial state in *Poetics, Plays, Performance: The Politics of Modern Indian Theatre* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

mostly oscillated between formulating a nationalist theatre practice oriented either towards the classical Sanskrit or folks forms, or a syncretic practice assimilating western theatrical practices, Dutt's work, as I have already mentioned, complicates common generic expectations from such periodizations as 'postcolonial drama.'⁸⁷ Within the canon of 'modern Indian theatre' his work is interesting in its rewriting of the text of the Cold War as well as of post-Bandung 'Third World' solidarity in the periphery. It can significantly contribute to an emergent trend in postcolonial studies that attempts to read these overlapping geopolitical tendencies together in order to displace the North/South axis of mapping cultural production.⁸⁸ As revitalized agitprop on yet another vector, *Teer*, along with some of Dutt's other plays, also presents an interesting counterpoint to the brief renewal of agitprop in the early- 1970s, especially in Britain but also in Canada and Australia.⁸⁹ Finally, to return to a point I had begun with, a reading of some of Dutt's plays can enable us to fashion a comparativist approach to the question of the 'global sixties' as it is staged not only in western Europe and the US but also within the 'Third World.'⁹⁰

⁸⁷ The standard references for postcolonial drama are Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London & NY: Routledge, 1996), Brian Crow and Chris Banfield, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Christopher Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), all three of which, however, engage insufficiently with the question of non-English language drama in the postcolonial context and the complexities inherent in a multilingual situation.

⁸⁸ Monica Popescu's recent work *South African Literature beyond the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave, 2010) is an example of this new trend.

⁸⁹ An interesting comparative work on the agitprop/political theatre of this period is Alan Filewod and David Watt, *Worker's Playtime: Theatre and the labour movement since 1970*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 2001).

⁹⁰ Two recent articles that re-open diverse periodization debates are Jean Graham-Jones, "Transculturating Politics, Realism, and Experimentation in 1960s Buenos Aires Theatre," *Theatre Survey*, 43: 1 (2002), which specifically approaches the concept of the nineteen sixties as a point of departure for studying contemporary drama, and Melissa

III. Translation, Collectivity and the Scene of Teaching in Brian Friel's *Translations*

In a poignant scene towards the end of Brian Friel's play *Translations* (1980), written at the height of the 'Northern Troubles' but set in early-nineteenth century Ireland, the beleaguered 'hedge school' master Hugh O'Donnell finally consents to teach/in English, and says to Maire, one of his last remaining students, "I will provide you with the available words and the available grammar. But will that help you to *interpret between privacies? I have no idea. But it's all we have.*"⁹¹ Critics of the play have mostly remarked on how this act of "interpreting between privacies," upheld by one of the central characters in the final scene, can be understood as an act of translation, which also functions as a root metaphor of Friel's text. This idea of translation also

Dana Gibson, "1979 And All That: Periodization in Post war British Theatre History, *Theatre Survey*, 47: 1 (May 2006) that problematize the relationship between the period of Thatcherist governance and British political theatre.
⁹¹. *Translations*, 67. Italics added.

'The Troubles' was a period of conflict in Northern Ireland from the late-1960s till the late-1990s, when the "peace process" eventually culminated in the "Belfast Agreement" on 10 April, 1998. It involved Irish nationalists and republicans, and a constellation of unionist and loyalist paramilitary forces, the British Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The cause of the conflict was nationalist/republican opposition to Northern Ireland's status within the United Kingdom, and the domination of and discrimination against the minority nationalist (mostly Catholic) community by the unionist, pro-Britain majority.

A 'hedge school' was a community run educational institution found mostly in rural Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries. While the schools did not always meet outdoors, as the word 'hedge' might indicate, they acquired a secretive dimension when Catholic schools were banned in colonial Ireland.

underlies dominant readings of the playwright's political and theatrical locations, namely, as the preeminent Irish dramatist of the intimate and the private.⁹² If such a reading appears paradoxical in a play that is evidently concerned with significant events of what I would call 'public translation': the ongoing English Ordnance Survey that was Anglicizing and codifying Irish place names in the name of colonial governmentality, and the impending changes in the countrywide school system that would mandate English instead of Irish as the medium of instruction, it can always be explained by citing Friel's unmistakable commitment to larger social and political issues, be it the founding of the activist theatre company Field Day in the nineteen seventies or his life-long championing of Irish cultural and political interests in the face of British rule. Through a close reading of *Translations*, along with Friel's published essays and interviews but also his voluminous research notes, drafts and correspondence housed at the National Library of Ireland and only recently opened up to researchers, I propose two broad but interconnected shifts within this current critical opinion of the play.⁹³ First, I read Hugh's remark about "interpreting between privacies" in English in the above extract, "I have no idea. / But it's all we have," as a

⁹². See, for instance, the work of critics like Richard Pine, *The Diviner: The Art of Brian Friel* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1999), F. C. McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama: language, Illusion, and Politics* (Syracuse; Syracuse University Press, 1999), and Tony Corbett, *Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2002).

⁹³ "The Brian Friel Papers," gifted to the state in December 2000, are housed in 160 boxes at The National Library of Ireland in Dublin. It contains notebooks, drafts, unpublished manuscripts, playbills, correspondence, contracts, programs, production photos, articles, uncollected essays, and a vast collection of assorted material relating to Friel's career as a writer from 1959 through 2000. This chapter is among the first studies of Friel that draws upon this newly available archive. The only other published text that claims to have consulted the Friel Papers is Anthony Roche's new book *Brian Friel: Theatre and Politics* that came out in May 2011 from Palgrave Macmillan. I was, unfortunately, unable to look at that work at the time of writing this.

double bind of ‘uncertainty/necessity’ to tease out a different concept of translation; one, that resonates with contemporary theoretical discussions of translation as a literary-ethical act that exists within a double bind of ‘impossible necessity,’ – “the impossibility of fully rendering another’s voice or meaning, and yet the necessity of making the attempt.”⁹⁴ When reconceptualized in this fashion translation, I argue, can be understood as a dramatic technique in the play rather than only as a theme as most critics have maintained. This is particularly significant since all considerations of the play’s dramatic technique so far has been skewed by the overwhelming critical attention devoted to an interesting even if obvious use of theatrical conceit by the playwright, the use of an extended metaphor whereby even as all the Irish and English characters ‘speak’ English on stage, strategic dramaturgical moves indicate to the reader/audience when someone speaks in Irish.

I will have more to say on this later; presently, my second point, somewhat following up on the previous one argues that translation, staged in the play as an act existing in a double bind of “necessary impossibility,” can model an understanding of a constitutive double bind of politics, namely, the formation of collectivity (“necessary”) without appealing to essentialist and exclusionary identity categories (“impossible”). Contemporary critiques of collectivity, often argued from various anti-essentialist positions, tend to valorize a politics of difference over (coercive) commonality. My argument, modeled on the structural double bind of translation, attempts to retain the

⁹⁴ For a selection of recent theoretical work that variously reads translation in this manner, see, Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood ed. *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), specifically their introduction “The Ethics of Translation.”

complex undecidability of the political – necessary yet incomplete – while suggesting, at the same time, newer ways of mobilizing a collective subjectivity. The vanishing, traditional Irish hedge school classroom in *Translations*, confronted with the coming of the new, colonial English-language National Schools in the early nineteenth century emerges in my reading as a site constitutive of such collectivity. While thematic readings of translation in the play, as I have mentioned above, are important they have largely focused on the theatres of ‘the family’ (private) and/or ‘the nation’ (public) as opposed to the material site of as well as the scene of teaching in the play, the hedge school itself. As I attempt to show in the course of this chapter, translation as a pedagogic practice in the hedge school is figured as a political instrument capable of constituting a new collectivity that cannot be readily accommodated into essentialist identity constructs like ‘the family’ or ‘the nation’. In other words, I read the hedge school as hedge school and not necessarily as a microcosm of ‘the Gaelic mind’ or ‘the Irish nation,’ an unfortunate tendency that has often produced provincialized readings of (Northern) Irish literature. My broader attempt, in this chapter as well as the dissertation, is to re-situate the work of an Irish playwright within a framework that would mark the specificity of its anomalous postcolonial provenance but also produce literary-political-ethical insights that can be critically generalized.

My reading of *Translations*, as I have already suggested, renders the text interpretable rather than merely identitarian and is probably best understood in the context of the production and reception histories of the play that have remained interminably entwined with the nationalist cause. *Translations* was first staged on 23

September 1980, in rather dramatic circumstances. The city of Derry in Northern Ireland that Friel had chosen to host the 'world premiere' of his play not only lacked a civic theatre at the time but was also a hotbed of the ongoing Troubles.⁹⁵ As a stark reminder of that conflict, the hunger strike by Irish Republican prisoners protesting the withdrawal of their political prisoner status was approaching its notorious showdown with Margaret Thatcher's conservative government in London.⁹⁶ It was a daring decision for a playwright whose earlier plays had opened in London and New York. In fact, Friel had to first form a local theatre company – the now-famous 'Field Day Theatre Company' – so that he could stage the play at hand. On a more ambitious note, he also wanted "to establish a theatrical voice free of the constraining influence of either London or Dublin and to offer that voice to Irish people, primarily in the North, who had lacked access to professional theatre."⁹⁷ For that, he teamed up with Belfast-actor Stephen Rea – whom he had met in London during rehearsals for an earlier play – and, who shared his vision of a theatre for 'the North.'⁹⁸ Money for the production and a possible tour was secured in parts from The Northern Ireland Arts Council (and the

⁹⁵. Lynne Riddell, "Why Friel and Rea are Having a 'Field' Day," in Paul Delany ed., *Brian Friel in Conversation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p.126.

⁹⁶. The hunger strike was mostly concentrated in Maze Prison near Lisburn, less than a hundred miles east of Derry. Following the death of some of the strikers in captivity and continued non-intervention by the British government, the strike officially ended on 3rd October 1981. While it was perceived as a tactical victory for Prime Minister Thatcher in Britain, the strike evidently radicalized Irish nationalist politics and is often cited as an immediate provocation behind the emergence of the republican Sinn Féin as a mainstream political party. The 1981 Irish hunger strike continues to inspire literary, theatrical and cinematic productions the most recent of which is the award winning film *Hunger* (2008) directed by Steve McQueen.

⁹⁷. Delany ed. *Brian Friel in Conversation*, 127.

⁹⁸. I discuss the concept of 'the North' later with respect to Scott Boltwood's recent work on Friel. 'The North' has been previously evoked as a category that might help to better understand the playwright's politics but is only recently receiving extended critical attention as an alternative to strictly nationalistic readings of his plays.

Derry City Council and the Arts Council in Dublin), and since the Council preferred to fund “existing establishments” the fact that they had become one overnight helped them get the much-needed subsidies.⁹⁹ The venue, the Guildhall of Derry, was also a provocative choice. A daunting neo-Gothic building fronting the river Foyle with British army barracks on the opposite bank and a barbed wire fence around its entrance to ward off possible bomb attacks by Republicans, it was a bastion of Unionism and the most potent symbol of the dominating English/Protestant presence in the lives of the local Catholic minority.¹⁰⁰ The Guildhall, incidentally, had also been the dramatic setting of *The Freedom of the City* (1973), Friel’s earlier play about the ‘Bloody Sunday’ events in Derry when fourteen unarmed civil rights demonstrators were shot dead by British troops in January 1972. *Translations*, however, was set in the fictional town of Ballybeg/Baile Beag in County Donegal about twenty miles outside Derry.¹⁰¹ The inaugural cast of ten included Stephen Rea, Liam Neeson, Ray McAnally, Nuala Hayes and Anne Hasson, and the production was directed by Art O’Brianin. The premiere turned out to be a tremendous success and *Translations* went on to become the biggest hit of the Dublin Theatre Festival later in the year followed by long runs in London and New York.¹⁰² One of the few Irish plays to have received such widespread international

⁹⁹. “In Interview with Ciaran Carty (1980),” in Christopher Murray ed., *Brian Friel: Essays, Dairies, Interviews 1964-1999* (London-New York: Faber and Faber, 1999), 81.

¹⁰⁰. Friel and Rea, however, received full cooperation and encouragement from the Derry City Council and the Guildhall staff to the extent that the Unionist Mayor of the city Marlene Jefferson even attended the opening night. Murray ed., 79-83.

¹⁰¹. Delany ed., *Brian Friel in Conversation*, 128.

¹⁰². Seamus Deane, “Introduction” in *Selected Plays - Brian Friel* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 21.

attention in the last thirty years – possibly rivaled by Friel’s own Tony Award-winning *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1992)¹⁰³ – *Translations* has been subsequently performed in Estonia, Iceland, France, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Norway, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland along with many Anglophone countries.

Writing at the peak of the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland Friel, as I have already mentioned, situated *Translations* back in 1833, in County Donegal, the northernmost county in a still Gaelic Ireland on the verge of the consolidation of British colonial rule. This transposition allowed him to dramatize a moment of a different, foundational violence when a vast and complex theatre of colonial social engineering was unfolding on the island. It was the time when the Sappers of the British Army, the Royal Engineers, carried out the famous Ordnance Survey of Ireland, which meticulously mapped and renamed/ Anglicized the whole country to accord with its recent (1800) integration into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland;¹⁰⁴ the Catholic Relief Act passed by the British Parliament in 1829 formalized the process of ‘Catholic Emancipation’ in Ireland and removed many of the restrictions placed on the community by earlier laws; the Education Act of 1831 passed at the behest of Edward Stanley, Chief Secretary of Ireland – a position once held by Edmund Spenser, an early advocate of the pacification of Ireland through the violent destruction of its language

¹⁰³ *Dancing at Lughnasa* premiered on 24 April 1990, at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. It opened on Broadway at the Plymouth Theatre on 24th October 1991, and won the Tony Award for Best Play in 1992.

¹⁰⁴. J.H. Andrews, *A Paper Landscape: The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) remains the authoritative text on the subject, and was also one of the three main historical source texts for *Translations*. I discuss this in more detail in the next paragraph.

and customs¹⁰⁵ – established the National Education Board and a state-run, non-denominational National School system which, sought to institutionalize English at the expense of Irish as the language of instruction;¹⁰⁶ and finally, a series of potato blights during the 1830s and early-1840s, culminating in the notorious ‘Great Famine’ of 1845 that decisively changed the demographics of Ireland as a result of large scale loss of population due to death and emigration.¹⁰⁷ Although not a polemic, *Translations*, which emerged as a significant text of the Irish postcolonial predicament, therefore dramatizes a set of events that have powerful emotive resonances in that context.

I should briefly mention here that Friel largely depends on J. H. Andrews’ *A Paper Landscape: The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (1975) for the dramatization of the acts and personnel related to the Ordnance Survey in *Translations*, which is his other significant source text along with Dowling’s *The Hedge Schools*. He also consulted *Memoirs* by Col. Thomas Colby, the director of the Ordnance Survey – and inspiration for the character of Captain Lancey in the play – as well as the letters of John O’Donovan, Irish scholar and antiquarian who worked as place-name researcher for the Survey; O’ Donovan also inspired the character of Owen in the play, school master Hugh’s urbane younger son who acted as the ‘translator’ between the Irish and

¹⁰⁵. Spenser’s *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), first published in 1633 years after it was written has often been thought of as the paradigmatic text outlining the British colonial project in Ireland. Also see Edward Said, “Yeats and Decolonization” in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993), pp. 220-38.

¹⁰⁶. P.J. Dowling’s *The Hedge Schools of Ireland* (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1968), Friel’s source text, is also the standard reference.

¹⁰⁷. See Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-1849* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) and Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine, 1845-52* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994) for well-documented histories of the Famine.

the English.¹⁰⁸ So impressed was Friel with Andrews' exhaustive account of the survey that at one point he had remarked, "...it seemed to me, all I had to do was dramatize *A Paper Landscape*."¹⁰⁹ He did not, of course, follow through on the intention to dramatize a non-fiction, even academic text, but he did experiment with a few similar interesting formal innovations in the text of *Translations*.¹¹⁰ The most remarkable of these improvisations is probably the inclusion of exact or almost exact quotations from George Steiner's *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975) in some of the dialogues in the play, most commonly the ones spoken by the school master Hugh. Friel came upon Steiner's then recently published book while working on a translation of Anton Chekov's *Three Sisters*, around the same time that he was beginning work on *Translations*. He was quite influenced by Steiner's views on translation and used the character of Hugh as a mouthpiece for some of those ideas. Here we only need to recall the opening quotation from the play where Hugh, in keeping with Steiner's views offers a definition of translation as "interpreting between privacies." Another revealing instance of the use of words directly borrowed from Steiner's *After Babel* occurs during his conversation with the English Lieutenant Yolland, the sympathetic Hibernophile who is involved in the actual work of transcribing the place names,:

¹⁰⁸ Friel, "Extracts from a Sporadic Diary (1979): *Translations*," in Murray ed., *Brian Friel*, p. 74. Col.Colby's memoirs have been recently re-published as *Colby's Ordnance Survey memoir of Londonderry*. 2nd ed. (Limavady: North-West, 1990).

¹⁰⁹ Murray ed. *Brian Friel*, 117.

¹¹⁰ Perhaps the first book length study that "views certain key aspects of the survey as intellectual and imaginative work," rather than simply a technical-scientific undertaking is Stiofán Ó Cadhla's recently published *Civilizing Ireland – Ordnance Survey 1824-1842: Ethnography, Cartography, Translation* (Dublin & Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2007).

Hugh:...I understand your sense of exclusion, of being cut off from a life here; and I trust you will find access to us with my son's help. But remember that words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen – to use an image you'll understand – it can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of...fact.¹¹¹

It is observations like these that have contributed towards the critical consensus on Friel's preferred ideas of translation, a territorial perspective so to speak, which I had suggested at the beginning.

All the scenes in *Translations* are set in the hedge school classroom except for the love scene between Irish-speaking Maire and English Lieutenant Yolland, which also, the stage directions tell us, "may be played in the schoolroom, but it would be preferable to lose – by lighting – as much of the schoolroom as possible...."¹¹² The play begins with a detailed and elaborate description of the stage which is in effect the hedge school room. Martin Puchner has identified stage directions as the crucial link between the readerly text of modern literary drama and its history of print arguing that stage directions may remain 'unread' during a performance but they become indispensable for and therefore get integrated into a drama text intended for publication.¹¹³ Friel had already stated his own position on the status of a carefully composed drama text with precise staging instructions in a "Self Portrait" written early on in his career: "I look on

¹¹¹ *Translations*, 43. The corresponding sentence in Steiner is: "A civilization is imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches, or matches only at certain ritual, arbitrary points, the changing landscape of fact" in George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York & London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 21.

¹¹² Brian Friel, *Translations* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), p.49. All quotations in the rest of this chapter are from this edition of the play.

¹¹³ Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 21.

my manuscript as an orchestral score, composed with infinite care and annotated where necessary with precise directions...I look to the director and the actors to interpret that score exactly as it is written.”¹¹⁴ A playwright in the tradition of Irish literary drama and admittedly skeptical of directorial ‘interpretations’ of his plays as is evident from the above comment, the importance of stage directions for Friel cannot be overestimated. As an example of what he possibly meant, I quote here at length from the introductory stage directions for *Translations*:

“The hedge school is held in a disused barn or hay-shed or byre. Along the back wall are the remains of five or six stalls – wooden posts and chains – where cows were once milked and bedded...A wooden stairway without a banister leads to the upstairs living-quarters (off) of the schoolmaster and his son. Around the room are broken and forgotten implements: a cart-wheel, some lobster-pots, farming tools, a battle of hay, a churn etc. There are also the stools and bench-seats which the pupils use and a table and a chair for the master...The room is comfortless and dusty and functional – there is no trace of a woman’s hand.”¹¹⁵

We can begin to anticipate the salience of the hedge school to the play from the fact that the two scenes of teaching that frame the text are both set there: Manus teaching Sarah to speak in Irish at the beginning, and Hugh, the erstwhile hedge-school master eventually beginning to teach English to Maire who is looking out for an opportunity to immigrate to America. A look at Friel’s handwritten notes for *Translations*, however, reveals that he had initially considered an alternative, more explicit framing device for the play – an autobiographical narrative for the school master Hugh from which he

¹¹⁴ Friel, “Self-Portrait,” in Murray ed. *Brian Friel*, 44.

¹¹⁵ *Translations*, 11

recounts the events on stage – but eventually settled for the hedge school setting.¹¹⁶

Perhaps he was inspired by the remembrances of the men associated with the Survey – Col. Thomas Colby’s *Memoirs* or the letters of John O’Donovan – which he read carefully as part of the research for writing *Translations*?¹¹⁷

A dramatic technique figured in translation stages the first scene of teaching in the play. The school master Hugh (“a large man, with residual dignity”) albeit a little drunk from the christening ceremony of a new born baby (“Nellie Ruadh’s baby”) in a neighborhood pub (“Anna na mBreag’s”), arrives to teach the day’s lessons to the small class assembled in his disused shed, and starts off with what is evidently his usual practice of teaching. I quote at length since this exchange is typical of many others throughout the play:

Hugh: And after the *caerimonia nominationis* – Maire?

Maire: The ritual of naming.

Hugh: Indeed – we then had a few libations to mark the occasion.

Altogether very pleasant. The derivation of the word

‘baptise’? – where are my Greek scholars? Doalty?

Doalty: Would it be –ah – ah –

Hugh: Too slow. James?

Jimmy: ‘*Baptizein*’ – to dip or immerse.

¹¹⁶ “Brian Friel Papers,” National Library of Ireland (MSS 37, 041-37,086).

¹¹⁷ See the interview with Liam Robinson, “New Play to Set Fire to the Foyle?” in Delany ed. *Brian Friel*, pp. 132-34.

Hugh: Indeed – our friend Pliny Minor speaks of the
'baptisterium' – the cold bath.

And then again:

Hugh: ...on my perambulations today – Bridget? Too slow. Maire?

Maire: *Perambulare* – to walk about.

Hugh: Indeed – I encountered Captain Lancey of the Royal Engineers who
 is engaged in the ordnance survey of this area...He then explained
 that he does not speak Irish. Latin? I asked. None. Greek? Not a
 syllable.

He speaks – on his own admission – only English; and to his
 credit he seemed suitably *verecund* – James?

Jimmy: *Verecundus* – humble.

Hugh: Indeed – he voiced some surprise that we did not speak his
 language...I went on to propose that our own culture and the
 classical tongues made a happier conjugation- Doalty?

Doalty: *Conjugo* – I join together.

(Doalty is so pleased with himself that he prods and winks at Bridget.)

Hugh: Indeed – English, I suggested, couldn't really express us. And
 again to his credit he acquiesced to my logic. Acquiesced – Maire?

(Maire turns away impatiently. Hugh is unaware of the gesture.)

Too slow. Bridget?

Bridget: *Acquiesco*.¹¹⁸

Some of the most important points about translation being the dramatic technique of *Translations* are staged in this scene. To begin with, I would like to suggest that what is taught in the hedge school is not simply Irish or Greek and Latin (or for that matter, English) but the ability to translate between these languages. This represents a shift in the terrain upon which dominant readings of the school in particular and the play in general often tends to rest. And it is Hugh's practice of teaching more than what he teaches that exemplifies my argument whereby the students are not only expected to provide the etymological references for the classical Greek and Latin, but also translate them into Irish. Recasting Friel's dramatic technique as translation also allows us to read another instance of his dramaturgical resolution of the problems of audience reception – a political problem, really – that always haunts a multilingual text: in spite of an emphasis on classical learning and affinity, a second order translation renders the Greek expressions in Roman script and makes it accessible to the presumably monolingual/English speaking audience.¹¹⁹ An appendix to the play text, however, reproduces the original Greek in a mark of ambivalence that inevitably characterizes the work of translation. The Irish-speaking characters' facility with Greek, on the other

¹¹⁸ *Translations*, pp. 23-25.

¹¹⁹ Responding to an Irish language version of the play, Friel remarked that while it was a laudable effort it would do away with the politics of his endeavor in the original version predicated as it is on the theatrical conceit that stages the contested relationship between the two languages.

hand might be read as an example of the lingual memory (as opposed to a cultural memory) of a language that fosters the ability to enter the otherwise absent text of the classics in the present. Friel's representation probably shares in the work of the 'dream nation,' the supposedly unbroken cultural narrative of 'classical Greece' put in place by the Enlightenment and European Philhellenism and still readily accessible in the present.¹²⁰ He, however, mentions that "These hedge schools masters were very erudite; that is why there are Greek and Latin lines in the play," a fact possibly gathered from reading Patrick Dowling's *The Hedge Schools of Ireland* (1935/1968), which as I have already mentioned, was an important source text for *Translations*.¹²¹ Largely drawing upon Dowling's text for his depiction of the hedge school in the play Friel's dramaturgy re-territorializes the site opening it up to newer interpretations.

Even though the play may not be explicitly 'about' the hedge school its importance in the scheme of dramatic things as more than just a symbolic setting becomes evident when the author observes:

"Under the Education Act of 1831 the national schools were implemented, and the pupils were leaving the hedge schools and starting at the national schools, as there was a formal shift from Irish-speaking to English-speaking. *That is the first thread of the play* (emphasis added)."¹²²

¹²⁰ I build upon Stathis Gourgouris's arguments in *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

¹²¹ Delany ed., *Brian Friel in Conversation*, 133.

¹²² Delany ed., 136.

He then lays out the “acceptable fiction” that he created for the hedge school specific to

*Translations*¹²³:

“The phenomenon of the hedge schools...is not quite as furtive as the received idea of it. On the one hand there is the folk memory, and on the other there is *our* particular hedge school, which is very prosaic. The play is about the absorption of one culture into another; but I hope it goes a bit deeper than that – about the dispute between the two aesthetics.”¹²⁴

Dowling, on the other hand, charts the historical rise of the hedge school, in the following manner:

...it was in the early part of the 18th century, when the continued rigorous enforcement of the laws against education rendered teaching a dangerous calling, that the Hedge School really took root. It was then, no doubt, that the term ‘Hedge School’ was first used. Because the law forbade the schoolmaster to teach, he was compelled to give instruction secretly: because the householder was penalised for harbouring the schoolmaster, he had perforce to teach, and that only the weather permitted, out of doors. He therefore, selected, in some remote spot, the sunny side of a hedge or bank which effectively hid him and his pupils from the eye of the chance passer-by, and there he sat upon a stone as he taught his little school, while his scholars lay stretched upon the green sward about him...Later when the laws against education were less strictly enforced, school was taught in a cabin, a barn, or any building that might be given or lent for the purpose, but the name ‘hedge school’ was still retained.¹²⁵

Finally, Hugh’s remark to English Captain Lancey about the inadequacy of the latter’s language for expressing the needs of his people in this early scene [“Indeed – English, I suggested, couldn’t really express us./ And again to his credit he acquiesced to my logic./ Acquiesced – Maire?/(Maire *turns away impatiently*. Hugh is unaware of the

¹²³ Murray ed. *Brian Friel*, p. 146.

¹²⁴ Delany ed., 136.

¹²⁵ Dowling, *The Hedge Schools*, pp. 35-36.

gesture.)] echoes his similar comment about the inability of English “to interpret between privacies” at the end of the play, and effectively frames the staging of translation as a necessary failure in the text. Maire’s refusal to acquiesce precisely at the moment when she is asked to come up with the Latin root of that word, although unnoticed by Hugh, signals the beginning of her discontent with learning Latin and Greek. I take this up for further discussion later in the chapter.

Set in 1833, four years after the Catholic Emancipation (1829) in Ireland but two years into the implementation of the Education Act (1831) Hugh O’ Donnell’s hedge school in *Translations* was undergoing a decisive transformation. Precariously surviving on the threshold of the arrival of the National Schools with their compulsory instruction in English and marginalization of Irish, the hedge school probably anticipates the structure of the ‘interdict’ that Jacques Derrida identifies at the heart of any experience of a colonial education system.¹²⁶ Talking about the interdiction on the teaching and learning of Arabic and Berber in French colonial schools in Algeria – and without losing sight of the specificities of the Algerian and the Irish colonial education situations– Derrida observes how the interdict assumed the form of primarily, “something *educational* (emphasis original), something which happens to you “at school,” but hardly a measure or decision, rather a pedagogical apparatus [*dispositif pédagogique*].”¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 7.

¹²⁷ Derrida, 37. The word ‘*dispositif*’ has specific usage yet a range of meanings in French, particularly as used by Michel Foucault in his studies of the workings of power. Here, I am venturing its translation as ‘apparatus’ as opposed to ‘mechanism’ in the current English edition of *Monolingualism*,₂ hoping to better connote its explanatory power in the context of teaching that I am discussing here.

Focusing on a reading of what happens “at school” under a colonial educational set up might then enable us to re-center a text like *Translations* with the problematic status of a ‘national classic’ away from its obvious preoccupations with the imaginaries of national and ethnic identity.¹²⁸ The fact that a significant method of teaching in the hedge school in the play consists of the students being constantly called upon to provide translations into Irish from Greek and Latin even as part of their everyday discourse can then enable us to re-imagine translation essentially as Friel’s dramatic technique, which structures the play-text but also maintains an aporetic relationship with it. In terms of pedagogical practice this situation also reminds us of Antonio Gramsci’s defense of education as disinterested inquiry offered as a critique of the utilitarian and vocational education advocated by the Gentile Reforms in Italy in 1922, while keeping in mind that this curious defense of traditional schooling in the *Prison Notebooks* might also have been a tactical and therefore paradoxical move to fool the prison censor.¹²⁹

My argument about reading the pedagogical practice in the hedge school in terms of translation is further supported by a pivotal scene when Owen, the schoolmaster’s younger and evidently more successful son, arrives from Dublin. Owen had previously been a student at his father’s hedge school before going off to the city for a successful career in business. An “easy and charming” young man, he also remembers the protocols of teaching (and the practices of living) in rural Baile Beag and

¹²⁸ Pine, *The Diviner*, ix.

¹²⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks, Vols 1&2*. Ed & trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992,1996)

can deftly re-activate his memory in order to make the return of the native as inconspicuous as possible. After all, he had come home in his capacity as the willing, bilingual, native informant who states with good-humored candor, "I'm employed as a part-time, underpaid, civilian interpreter. My job is to translate the quaint, archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King's good English."¹³⁰ Owen is undoubtedly visibly excited to be back but quickly and charmingly gets to the point of his return:

Owen: ...Listen – am I interrupting you all?

Hugh: By no means. We are finished for the day.

Owen: Wonderful. I'll tell you why. Two friends of mine are waiting outside the door. They'd like to meet you and I'd like you to meet them...

Hugh: Certainly, You'll all eat and have...

Owen: Not just yet, Father. You've seen the sappers working in this area for the past fortnight, haven't you? Well, the older man is Captain Lancey...

Hugh: I've met Captain Lancey.

Owen: Great. He's the cartographer in charge of this whole area.

Cartographer – James?

(Owen begins to play this game – his father's game – partly to involve his classroom audience, partly to show he has not forgotten it, and indeed partly

¹³⁰ *Translations*, 29.

because he enjoys it.)

Jimmy: A maker of maps.

Owen: Indeed – and the younger man that I travelled with from Dublin,

his name is Lieutenant Yolland and he is attached to the

toponymic department –

Father? – *responde – responde!*

Hugh: He gives names to places.

Owen: Indeed – although he is in fact an orthographer – Doalty? – too

slow – Manus?

Manus: The correct spelling of names.

Owen: Indeed – indeed!¹³¹

While Richard Kearney in his influential reading of Friel's *Translations* interprets Owen's "playing the game" as "reminding his people that he is still one of their own," "thus subscrib[ing] to the password of the tribe," I would argue that if we read the parenthetical directions further on – "*play this game...partly to involve his classroom audience*" – then it emerges as a conscious practice that is indulged by Owen, and Hugh before him, and can perhaps be better understood as the setting to work of translation-as-dramatic technique which doubles as pedagogic practice.¹³² If we shift to the biographical register, then we find out that Brian Friel, although born in 1929 in

¹³¹ *Translations*, 28.

¹³² Richard Kearney, "Language Play: Brian Friel and Ireland's Verbal Theatre," in William Kerwin ed. *Brian Friel: A Casebook* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1997), pp. 93-94.

County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, grew up in Derry to become a schoolteacher, like his father and sisters before him. While he had graduated from a seminary at Maynooth, outside Dublin, without becoming a priest, Friel had completed his teacher training at St. Joseph's College in Derry. Reminiscing in an interview he later remarked, "My father was a teacher and I became a teacher too, but gave it up to write stories for *The New Yorker*. They paid such enormous money I found I could live off three stories a year."¹³³ Another revealing biographical influence is thrown up by a comment like this: "I suppose I became interested in this theme because my great-grandfather was a hedge school master, and my grandparents were Irish speaking - mainly I often thought to exclude us children from their conversation..."¹³⁴ It is therefore quite plausible that these early experiences of teaching (and teacher training) later contributed to his dramatization of the hedge school and the schoolmaster in *Translations*, making it possible to read the text, after a fashion, as staging the pedagogical dilemmas posed by a rift between a language of education and its immediate cultural context.

While Friel criticism too often displays the limitations I have pointed out in my introduction the recent work of critics like Shaun Richards, W.B. Worthen and Scott Boltwood attempts, in various degrees, to resist narrowly territorial frameworks of interpretation of the plays and gestures in the direction in which I am trying to go in

¹³³ Interview with Ciaran Carty (1980), in Murray ed. *Brian Friel*, 82.

¹³⁴ Delany ed. *Brian Friel*, 134.

this chapter.¹³⁵ Shaun Richards in his reading of Friel's later 'history plays' for instance, suggests that "a nationalist reading technique encourages nostalgic if not sentimental views of Irish culture and history...[but] an oppositional strategy has the ability to uncover a 'reading [that] is paradoxically both more disturbing and potentially sustaining.'" ¹³⁶ Although an enabling reading, Richards' nuanced arguments, however, do not entirely displace essentialist identity categories as indices of literary reading but merely legitimize them by reversal. Scott Boltwood, reading Friel's early plays in his recent book *Brian Friel, Ireland, and the North* (2007) on the other hand, argues that, "...nationalist frameworks incorporate [them] into an interpretive nexus that diminishes the text and renders part of it literally unreadable."¹³⁷ His 'non-nationalistic' reading of Friel argues for the increasing prominence of the concept of 'the North' or 'Northern' in his writing as an alternative identity to 'Irish' or 'nationalist,' signaling an estrangement from early Republican sympathies. By the time he writes *Translations*, and what is usually thought to be its sequel, *The Communication Cord* (1982), Friel, according to Boltwood, implicitly characterizes them as 'Northern plays.'¹³⁸ Boltwood's synchronic focus on "the survival of Gaelic culture within the dramatic community and the extent to which Hugh's hedge school disseminates it," begins to gesture in a

¹³⁵ See Shaun Richards, "Placed identities for Placeless Times: Brian Friel and Post-Colonial Critics," *Irish University Review* 27.1 (1997), W.B. Worthen, "Homeless Words: Field Day and the Politics of Translation," in Kerwin ed. *Brian Friel*, 1997, and Scott Boltwood, *Brian Friel, Ireland and The North* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹³⁶ Shaun Richards, "Placed identities for Placeless Times: Brian Friel and Post-Colonial Critics," *Irish University Review* 27.1 (1997), p. 61.

¹³⁷ Scott Boltwood, *Brian Friel, Ireland and The North* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2007, p. 45.

¹³⁸ Boltwood, *Brian Friel*, pp. 139-61.

direction that could have re-oriented dominant readings of the play but it ultimately gets subsumed in his overarching interest in wresting a 'third space,' so to say, for locating Friel's identity.¹³⁹ While his broad arguments against employing either cultural-nationalist criteria or essentialist constructs in reading Friel speak directly to my own project, I would like to take a brief detour to comment on Boltwood's characterization of Friel as subaltern. What Boltwood drawing upon Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern theorists calls Friel's subalternity and the "failure of the nation to come to its own" in his work – and McGrath drawing upon Homi Bhabha calls Friel's hybridity and 'new nationalism' in *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* (1999) – I think, ultimately constitute an attempt to grasp 'a position with two identities' (province/republic, north/south). The condition of subalternity "cut off as it is from all access to lines of mobility" including that of the state, on the other hand, appears to be rather "a position without identity".¹⁴⁰ Misarticulated as Friel might very well be, resulting from the failure of readers and critics from the North as well as the South to produce an adequate framework for reading his work, I would still hesitate to readily ascribe subalternity as discussed above to a Tony-award-winning playwright whose work regularly premieres on the West End in London or Broadway in New York.

W.B. Worthen's reconceptualizing of the play's politics on non-essentialist terms is probably closest to my approach here in trying to open up the critical reception of

¹³⁹ Boltwood, *Brian Friel*, p. 154.

¹⁴⁰ See, for instance, Spivak, "Scattered speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular," *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2005), pp. 475-486 for such an account of subalternity.

Translations While critical of the politics of Field Day in general for participating in “a familiar nationalist mythology,” and skeptical of its politics of translation in particular, Worthen still thinks that “in plays like *Translations*, the performative possibility of translation seems to suggest an interrogation between origin, authority, and political agency,” – all manner of prostheses, to ventriloquize Derrida, trying to posit a solidity of being and purpose.¹⁴¹ While Worthen’s reading of Friel’s poetics and politics of translation in the play might seem a little overdetermined by his account of the influence of Steiner’s concept of translation on the playwright, its importance lies first and foremost in articulating “the translational politics of Field Day’s work,” “translation as a theatrical politics...to keep...alterity visible.”¹⁴² Such a rethinking of ‘translation as theatrical politics’ in the play already re-imagines translation on a different terrain, in a move away from its straightforward reading as an identitarian trope, and brings us one step closer to my own re-articulation of ‘translation as dramatic strategy’ in the play. While Worthen cites two of the most interesting scenes of such “translational politics” in the text to make his point, I would like to cite them here to take the argument a step further. Here are the two scenes where Owen is called upon to ‘translate’ the orders and instructions of Captain Lancey regarding the Survey to his fellow Irish assembled in the hedge school, the first time generating consent (Act One), the second time threatening coercion (Act Three):

Owen: It might be better if you assume they understand you –
Lancey: Yes?

¹⁴¹ Worthen, 1997, 145.

¹⁴² Kerwin ed. *Brian Friel*, p.150.

Owen: And I'll translate as you go along.

Lancey: I see. Yes. Very well. Perhaps you're right. What we are doing is this. (*He looks at Owen, Owen nods reassuringly.*) His Majesty's government has ordered the first ever comprehensive survey of this entire country - a general triangulation which will embrace detailed hydrographic and topographic information and which will be executed to a scale of six inches to the English mile. [...]

Owen: A new map is being made of the whole country.
(*Lancey looks to Owen: Is that all? Owen smiles reassuringly and indicates to proceed.*)

Lancey: This enormous task has been embarked on so that the military authorities will be equipped with up-to-date and accurate information on every corner of this part of the Empire.

Owen: The job is being done by soldiers because they are skilled in this work. [...]

Lancey: In conclusion I wish to quote two brief extracts from the white paper which is our governing letter: (*Reads*) 'All former surveys of Ireland originated in forfeiture and violent transfer of property; the present survey has for its object the relief which can be afforded to the proprietors and occupiers of land from unequal taxation.'

Owen: The captain hopes that the public will cooperate with the sappers and that the new map will mean that taxes are reduced.[...]

Lancey: 'Ireland is privileged. No such survey is being undertaken in England. So this survey cannot but be received as proof of the disposition of this government to advance the interests of Ireland.' My sentiments too.

Owen: This survey demonstrates the government's interest in Ireland and the captain thanks you for listening so attentively to him. ¹⁴³

When Manus confronts Owen with "What sort of a translation was that, Owen?...You weren't saying what Lancey was saying!," he tries to get away by way of philosophical humor with some help from Steiner - "Uncertainty in meaning is incipient poetry' - who said that?"¹⁴⁴ However, when later in the play Lt. Yolland has gone missing and the work of the survey was being delayed, Captain Lancey calls upon Owen's services

¹⁴³ *Translations*, 31.

¹⁴⁴ *Translations*, 32.

again to deliver his threats of destruction if Yolland's whereabouts are not revealed by the suspected locals:

Lancey: ...I will address them and it will be their responsibility to pass on what I have to say to every family in this section.

(Lancey *indicates to Owen to translate*. Owen *hesitates, trying to assess the change in Lancey's manner and attitude*.)

I'm in a hurry, O'Donnell.

Owen: The captain has an announcement to make.

Lancey: Lieutenant Yolland is missing. We are searching for him. If we don't find him, or if we receive no information as to where he is to be found, I will pursue the following course of action. (*He indicates to Owen to translate*.)

Owen: They are searching for George. If they don't find him-

Lancey: Commencing twenty-four hours from now we will shoot all livestock in Ballybeg.

(Owen *stares at Lancey*)

At once.

Owen: Beginning this time tomorrow they'll kill every animal in Baile Beag - unless they're told where George is.

Lancey: If that doesn't bear results, commencing forty-eight hours from now we will embark on a series of evictions and leveling of every abode in the following selected areas-

Owen: You're not-!

Lancey: Do your job. Translate [...]

Lancey: Swinefort

Owen: Lis na Muc

Lancey: Burnfoot

Owen: Bun na hAbhann [...]

Lancey: If by then the lieutenant hasn't been found, we will proceed until a complete clearance is made of this entire section.

Owen: If Yolland hasn't been got by then, they will ravish the whole parish. Expand the quotes

Translation, recent theoretical developments tell us, is a 'necessary impossibility.'

My attempt in this chapter is to think the staging of collectivity in contemporary drama and theatre on the model of such 'necessary impossibility,' and I try to argue for a

recasting of dramatic technique in terms of translation to enable such a move.¹⁴⁵ The necessary failure of translation as of a pre-determined collectivity is due to the fundamental aporia of communication – we cannot address/access our intended listener in a straight line that guarantees perfect comprehension. I would suggest that in the above extract from the play this governing aporia of communication is validated precisely in its violation under conditions of coercion, the curve of translation is ‘straightened,’ so to say, under the injunction of the military – ‘strategic’ in its true sense, perhaps – in order to convey the message. The second time around, Owen is forced to provide as literal and accurate and concise a translation of Capt. Lancey’s orders as he could. It was a controversial scene since historical records don’t exactly confirm if the Sappers were used for such eviction measures, however, it is of necessity a message of failure, of communication of course, but also of a larger social order structured around it. The irony cannot be missed in that while the English captain names the places he wants to destroy in the newly ‘standardized’ English, Owen, the native informant, translates them back into their original Irish for the benefit of the assembled crowd. The relationship between translation and the military has been the subject of critical attention - and not only because of the telling binary ‘*traduttore, traditore*’/ literally ‘translator traitor’ – but has acquired a poignant contemporary relevance given the events that have transpired regarding military translators during

¹⁴⁵ I discuss the critical-theoretical genesis of this argument in more detail in my general introduction to the dissertation.

the ongoing Iraq war. Emily Apter provides a slightly different reading of the episode in *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*.¹⁴⁶

During the time when he was beginning to work on *Translations* Friel noted in a diary entry on 29 May, 1979:

I am now at the point when the play must be begun and yet all I know about it is this:
 I *don't want* to write a play about Irish peasants being pressed by English sappers.
 I *don't want* to write a threnody on the death of the Irish language.
 I *don't want* to write a play about land-surveying.
 Indeed I *don't want* to write a play about naming places.
 And yet portions of all these are relevant. Each is part of the atmosphere in which the real play lurks.¹⁴⁷ (italics added)

Interpretations of texts, as we well know, need not slavishly abide by authorial intention, however, it is striking how much of the critical attention on *Translations* have focused on precisely some of these above-mentioned aspects that Friel explicitly *refuses* to foreground (“death of the Irish language,” “land-surveying,” “naming places” etc.), thus ignoring the above entry as a trace of the author in its negativity in the text. Consequently, the possibility of reading the material setting of the play itself – the hedge school – has not been sufficiently explored. And, the questions of collectivity that have occupied critics of Friel’s plays in general and *Translations* in particular have mostly been articulated in terms of the larger world *outside* the text. In fact, reading collectivity in *Translations* has always been a reading of failure precisely because the often homogenizing, totalizing collectivities hovering above the hedge school shed –

¹⁴⁶ See Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁷ “Extracts from a Sporadic Diary (1979): *Translations*” in Murray ed. *Friel, Essays*, p.75.

'Irish nation,' 'Irish psyche,' 'Gaelic culture,' a 'Catholic community' etc. – do seem to come undone in the course of the play. What this has meant, however, is that even critics who approve of Friel's nuanced political positions in general, and a play like *Translations* in particular, have in effect remained bound up within the Irish national-historical context as a heuristic framework.¹⁴⁸ Instead, my reading of the play attempts to foreground the dramatization of a possible formation of collectivity in/of the hedge school 'classroom.'¹⁴⁹ Such a reading is enabled by resituating the literary-dramatic *topos* of the play to the schoolroom that not only exposes the limitations of a concept of collectivity as "constituted groups" that underlies most readings of *Translations* but also opens up new ways of thinking around it.

In my reading of the play I draw upon some of the arguments put forward by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her reading of Derrida's imaginings of collectivity as they are articulated in *Specters of Marx* and *The Politics of Friendship*.¹⁵⁰ At the risk of oversimplifying her points, let me quickly summarize Spivak's reading here.

Commenting on the vicissitudes of collectivity in Derrida's work in the early-nineties, Spivak argues that the text of *Politics*, delivered as it was as a teaching seminar makes a

¹⁴⁸ See Richard Pine, *The Diviner: The Art of Brian Friel* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1999), F. C. McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama: language, Illusion, and Politics* (Syracuse; Syracuse University Press, 1999), and Tony Corbett, *Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁹ It is surprising that given the preponderance of scenes of teaching in Irish literary texts, the classroom has rarely been studied as a site of the formation of collectivity. A notable exception is Carol Tell's "Considering Classroom Communities: Ciaran Carson and Paul Muldoon," *The Yearbook of English Studies Vol 35: Irish Writing since 1950* (2005), pp. 91-106.

¹⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International* tr. Peggy Kamuf (New York & London: Routledge, 1994) and *The Politics of Friendship* tr. George Collins (London/New York: Verso, 1997).

move away from the 'New International' announced in *Specters*, and marks more emphatically the appearance of the "implicit model of the classroom as the workshop of the production of collectivity" in Derrida's work.¹⁵¹ Derrida introduces *The Politics of Friendship* by telling us that the text "was only the first session of a seminar conducted with this title, 'Politics of Friendship,' in 1988-89.[...] In the course of the academic year 1988-89, each session opened with these words...[...] Week after week, its voices, tones, modes and strategies were tried on, to see...if the scenography could be set in motion around itself. This work...represents, only the first session."¹⁵² Spivak concludes her reading by emphasizing "*Politics of Friendship* is only a book, between covers. For the real text, you must enter the classroom, act it out in imagining...as a preview of the formation of collectivities."¹⁵³ I try to build upon this remarkable reading where the language of teaching and instruction remains intertwined with the languages of the stage (setting "the scenography" in motion).

The attempt to read *Translations* in order to trace the lineaments of the formation of collectivity vis-à-vis the hedge school classroom can be multiply situated – with respect to the modern literary-dramatic tradition in Ireland on the one hand and the critical commentary by and on Friel on the other. Friel's Irishness is complicated by his self-description of being "a member of the [Catholic] minority living in the [largely

¹⁵¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Note on the New International," *parallax*, Vol 7, No. 3 (2001), 14.

¹⁵² Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, pp. vii-viii.

¹⁵³ Spivak, "New International," 13.

Protestant] North.”¹⁵⁴ Over the course of his lifetime Friel and his family eventually moved from Derry into Donegal gradually moving north along the estuary of the river Foyle to end up at Muff, County Donegal, right on the border of the two Irelands where he still resides. Friel has been notoriously reticent when it comes to the press and publicity (aided in part by his remote residence, emphatically away from either Dublin or Belfast), but has never shied away from writing about his rather well formulated ideas on the kind and purpose of theatrical work he wanted to do. Speaking on the relationship between theatre and collectivity early on in his career Friel had remarked and I would like to quote him at length:

“...the dramatist doesn't write for one man; he writes for an audience, a collection of people. His technique is the very opposite of the short-story writer's or novelist's. They function privately, man to man, a personal conversation. Everything they write has the implicit preface, 'Come here till I whisper in your ear.' But the dramatist functions through the group; not a personal conversation but a public address. His technique is the technique of the preacher and the politician. Every time a curtain rises, a dramatist begins, 'Ladies and gentlemen...' Of course his concern is to communicate with every individual in that audience, but he can do that only through the collective mind. If he cannot get the attention of that collective mind, hold it, persuade it, mesmerize it, manipulate it, he has lost everything. And this imposes strange restrictions on him because the collective mind is a peculiar mind. It is more formal. It is receptive to new theories. It is more simple, more spontaneous. But it is not as educated nor as sophisticated. And above all it is - or pretends to be - more easily shocked.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Brian Friel in the television documentary *Brian Friel* (Ferndale Films, 2000).

¹⁵⁵ Friel, “The Theatre of Hope and Despair,” in Murray ed. *Brian Friel*, pp. 18-19. It was delivered as a lecture to the Thomas More Association Symposium in Chicago, 1967.

These sentiments also resonate in a couple of interviews Friel gave around the same time where he talks about how he expects people to react in the theatre:

The theatre is altogether so different from a short story anyhow. You get a group of people sitting in an audience and they aren't individual thinking people any longer once they're in an audience. They are a corporate group who act in the same way as a mob reacts - emotionally and spontaneously."¹⁵⁶

Mass intellect is a very different thing to individual intellect. The group of people we call an audience is something like a mob, and they are incapable of individual thought. But at the same time this mob has a different kind of attitude to the one they had twenty or thirty years ago. They are more receptive to intellectual concepts.¹⁵⁷

We can read at least two literary-historical tendencies in the above comments, which can be understood as somewhat symptomatic of the early stages of Friel's writing career. For someone who would go on to become the most well known (post-Beckett) Irish dramatist Friel, as I have previously mentioned, had actually started off with writing short stories. He initially wrote for the *Irish Monthly* and the *Irish Press* but it was the publication of "The Skelper" in *The New Yorker*, in 1959 that earned him early recognition. Subsequently, he became a regular contributor and entered into a contract of 'first refusal' with *The New Yorker* which eventually resulted in the publication of two volumes under the titles: *The Saucer of Larks* (1962) and *The Gold in the Sea* (1966).¹⁵⁸ The comparison between the craft of the short story writer and the dramatist, and the

¹⁵⁶. "In Interview with Graham Morison (1965)," in Murray ed. *Brian Friel*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵⁷. "In Interview with Desmond Rushe (1970)," in Murray ed. *Brian Friel*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁸. *The Saucer of Larks* (New York : Doubleday, 1962); *The Gold in the Sea* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

different functions of the two genres that we hear in the above extracts, therefore, owe something to the formal transition Friel himself was making around that time. It was a significant transition also because it eventually inspired him to take up writing full time.

Friel's Field Day colleague and critic Seamus Deane, however, observes:

"All of Friel's major work dates from the mid-1970s. Before that, he had been an immensely skillful writer who had found himself being silently exploited by the ease with which he could satisfy the taste for Irishness which institutions like *The New Yorker* and the Irish Theatre had become so expert in establishing."¹⁵⁹

Even if we agree that his early work (from radio plays he wrote for BBC Northern Ireland in the 1950s up to the very successful *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* in 1964) might be called largely apolitical, Friel along with a host of other Northern writers were soon galvanized by the worsening political situation in Northern Ireland in the late-sixties and early-seventies. His participation in the 'Bloody Sunday' march in Derry in January 1972 was probably a turning point, and a play-in-progress at the time eventually came together as *The Freedom of the City*. Friel's next three plays – *Volunteers* (1975), about the fate of political prisoners accused of betrayal because they offered to work for a archaeological dig, *Living Quarters* (1977), a retelling of the Theseus/Hippolytus myth in a contemporary Irish setting that examines the suicide of a domineering father, and *Aristocrats* (1979), a consideration of the vicissitudes of a Roman catholic aristocrat family – were all produced in the Abbey Theatre in Dublin before beginning their runs abroad in London and New York. Perhaps as a build up to the writing of *Translations*, all of these plays seem to stage the confrontation of the languages of power and

¹⁵⁹ Deane, *Selected Plays*, pp.16-17.

powerlessness that operate within an “atmosphere of permanent crisis and of unshakable apathy,” if only to expose the violent foundations of traditional authority.¹⁶⁰

Interestingly, Friel’s comments about theatre and collectivity, going back to his comments on the audience, also resonate with the founding moment of modern Irish theatre as evidenced, for instance, in this passing remark by W.B. Yeats in a 1902 article in *The United Irishman*: “It is in the Theatre that the mob becomes a people.”¹⁶¹ A more sustained exploration of this idea can be found in a short piece, “Emotion of Multitude” written a year later. Commenting on the shortcomings of the French dramatic model of the “well-ordered fable” with “clear and logical construction” on the modern stage Yeats observes, “It came into my head the other day that this construction, which all the world has learnt from France, has everything of high literature except the emotion of multitude,” something he argued was summoned up by the chorus in Greek drama, and when “the sub-plot is the main plot working itself out in more ordinary men and women” in Shakespeare.¹⁶² It should be stated, however, that this perceived similarity between the two playwright’s thinking of collectivity vis-à-vis theatre is not intended for a straightforward genealogical reading. For although Friel never fails to credit Yeats (along with Synge) with the founding of ‘Irish’ drama and theatre (“if we take as our definition of Irish drama plays written in Irish or English on Irish subjects and

¹⁶⁰ Deane, *Selected Plays*, 17.

¹⁶¹ See Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, Vol. 2, p. 286, in an appraisal of the acting of A.E.’s (George Russell) *Deirdre* by an all-Irish cast. He was probably referring to Victor Hugo’s comments on the theatre. See Lorenzo O’Rourke, ed. and trans., *Victor Hugo’s Intellectual Autobiography* (London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1907), pp. 369-70. Graham Morison also suggests a similar connection.

¹⁶² W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 215-16.

performed by Irishmen”), and thinks of himself as squarely belonging to that tradition, his differences with his predecessors comes through in this somewhat playful summary of the characteristics of Irish theatre:

“Irish drama is a horse of an altogether different colour and is remarkable for four things. It is seventy-three years old. It was founded by Yeats, an elitist, who set out to establish an ‘unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many,’ and who discovered with dismay that instead ‘we have been the first to create a true People Theatre...Yet we did not set out to create this sort of theatre and its success has been to me a discouragement and a defeat.’ It has produced two playwrights, Synge and O’Casey, who are considered classics. And it has packed into its brief life more riots than the English theatre has seen in eight hundred years.”¹⁶³

While they both shared the same ambivalent attitude towards nationalism Friel’s concern with the spoken word and in turn language – unlike Yeats – never motivated him to move away from imagining, dramatizing and engaging collectivity.¹⁶⁴ On the contrary, ever since he wrote *Freedom of the City* in the aftermath of the Bloody Sunday riots in 1972 some critics have accused him of uncritically siding with the Northern nationalists and their ideas. Friel, however, had already stated his critical position on the issue as is evident in this extract from an article written for *The Times Literary Supplement* around the same time, “...in each of us the line between the Irish mind and the creative mind is much too fine. That there must be a far greater distinction between the Irish man who suffers and the artist’s mind which creates. That the intensity of the

¹⁶³. Friel, “Plays Peasant and Unpeasant” (1972) in Murray ed. *Brian Friel*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁴ See Puchner, *Stage Fright*, pp. 119-138, for a reading of Yeats’ dramatic treatment of the question of collectivity with reference to his modernist drama.

emotion we all feel for our country...is not of itself the surest foundation for the best drama..."¹⁶⁵

To counter atavistic accusations of Gaelic revivalism he further clarified his position in an 1980-interview, "...I'm not talking about the revival of the Irish language. I'm just talking about the language we have now and what use we make of it and about the problems that having it gives us. The assumption, for instance, is that we speak the same language as England. And we don't."¹⁶⁶ These complicated but far from complacent ideas on language and nationalism also formed the basis of the 'Field Day Theatre Company' that Friel had formed with actor Stephen Rea in 1980 in order to stage *Translations*.¹⁶⁷ 'Field Day,' with the unmistakable military ring to its name was, however, coined to echo the last names of Friel and Rea but soon got on board Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, Tom Paulin and David Hammond to become a larger cultural collaboration. Field Day had set out to create a new artistic "fifth province" as if to supplement the traditional four provinces of Ireland (Leinster, Munster, Connacht and Ulster) and their historical baggage.¹⁶⁸ Born out of disaffection with both the situation in Northern Ireland as well as the Republic to the south but strategically straddling the two states from its location in Derry, Friel remarked that "...the phrase 'Fifth Province,'

¹⁶⁵ Murray ed. *Brian Friel*, 53.

¹⁶⁶ Murray, 80.

¹⁶⁷ See Marilyn J. Richtarik, *Acting Between the Lines: The Field Day Theatre Company and Irish Cultural Politics 1980-1984* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁶⁸ Northern Ireland, sometimes colloquially thought to be synonymous with the province of Ulster, actually includes only six of the nine counties in the province. The rest of Ulster's three counties along with twenty-three others in the rest of the island constitute the Republic of Ireland.

[appropriated from critic Richard Kearney]... may well be a province of the mind, through which we hope to devise another way of looking at Ireland, or another possible Ireland..." that must first be "articulated, spoken, written, painted sung" into existence.¹⁶⁹ It is not surprising, therefore, that as Field Day increasingly moved closer to a cultural-nationalistic orientation more identified with the Provisional IRA, Friel felt compelled to distance himself from the artistic collective he had helped co-found only after staging its first three, self-authored productions – *Translations*, an adaptation-translation of Chekov's *Three Sisters* (1981) in Irish-English, and *The Communication Cord* (1982). Specifically, for our purpose, the importance of the hedge school for *Translations* that I have been trying to foreground also comes through emphatically when he says, "There is no question of the new company or the play...being a part of a crusade for anything. The action takes place in the Ireland of the 1830s when the students of the hedge schools were living through a very significant phase in history. It is an Irish speaking place in Donegal at the time when the Education Act of 1831 was coming into operation and the national schools were bringing about the decay of the hedge schools."¹⁷⁰ For critics and commentators, Friel's appeal often consists of these ambivalent positions held by "a lapsed Catholic from Derry" on Irish nationalism who resolutely refuses to move out of his rural home on the border of the two Irelands, equally distancing himself from Belfast and Dublin.

¹⁶⁹ Delany ed. *Brian Friel in Conversation*, 193.

¹⁷⁰ Delany, 133.

Dramatizing a few days in the life of the 'Class of 1833' at Hugh O'Donnell's's hedge school in Baile Beag, *Translations* stages a collectivity whose constitution is perhaps most productively understood in the context of the classroom. In a way, the institution of the hedge school survives in different non-institutional manifestations: Hugh finally agrees to teach English in his school when he tells Maire, "Yes, I will teach you English, Maire Chatach/ [...] Indeed, you may well be my only pupil./ [...] We'll begin tomorrow."¹⁷¹ Manus, his elder son and a former student, goes away to start another hedge school on the island of Inis Meadhon in the south. [Manus: I've just had a meeting with two men from Inis Meadhon. They / want me to go there and start a hedge school. They are giving me a / free house, free turf, and free milk; a rood of standing corn; twelve / drills of potatoes;...].¹⁷² The Donnelly twins, who remain offstage throughout the play and had not come for their classes, perhaps end up organizing a resistance against the English Sappers? It's hinted that they might be involved in the disappearance of Lt. Yolland, Captain Lancey's deputy who had fallen in love with Ireland, and then Maire, in that order. [Bridget: Leave me alone, Owen. I know nothing about Yolland. If you/ want to know about Yolland, ask the Donnelly twins.]¹⁷³ And Maire, who wanted to learn English instead of Latin and Greek, or rather the ability to translate between Irish and English according to the pedagogic practice in the hedge school [I don't want Greek. I don't want Latin. I want English. / I want to be

¹⁷¹ *Translations*, 61.

¹⁷² *Translations*, 46.

¹⁷³ *Translations*, 58.

able to speak English because I'm going to America as soon as the harvest's all saved."], returns as one of the few students left at the school on the condition that Hugh will teach her her desired language.¹⁷⁴ In an interesting move, the dramatization of Maire as the only figure of upward mobility in *Translations* complicates any easy critical consensus on at least two grounds: first, her situation, I suggest drawing upon Spivak's reading of a politics of language in a similar situation of settler colonialism among the Australian Aborigines, is not simply an identitarian lament for the "loss of language" but a practical request for access to hegemonic narratives of upward mobility achievable in her present situation only through an education in English.¹⁷⁵ It is no wonder then that her persistence in learning English – in order to eventually immigrate to the United States in search of better times away from the moribund life in rural Ireland – leaves her as the sole surviving student in Hugh's school at the end of the play. Second is the usual image of Field Day as a theatre company that was chastised early on for ignoring the politics of gender in their zeal for a critique of nationalism in their stage productions. Dissatisfied with her 'traditional' role as a farm woman in the increasingly imploding world of rural Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Maire recognizes that only an ability to be bilingual in Irish/English can open up a passage to America and imagined freedom ["Maire: I hope to God there's no hay to be saved in Brooklyn."]¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ *Translations*, 26.

¹⁷⁵ See Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 404.

¹⁷⁶ *Translations*, 60.

If the collectivity, “the real “political” model that underlies any academic book is the educational institution” then that which underlies a play would probably have to be the theatre audience.¹⁷⁷ Drama and theatre directly engage collectivity on at least two levels – “collaborative production” and “collective reception” – but it is clearly the latter in the shape of the audience that constitutes its broader political relation to the social and public spheres.¹⁷⁸ I would like to conclude by posing the question, does Brian Friel’s *Translations* stage a possible shift in (or extend) the possibilities of ‘real’ political models that can underlie the text of drama and theatre, from that of the performance space to perhaps ‘the classroom’? Reconceptualized in these terms, we might be able to not only launch a critique of “an unexamined supposition of collectivity” – primordial affiliations of the national-cultural-religious varieties that often cloud the critical reception of Friel and other playwrights working out of similar embattled political situations elsewhere – but also venture towards imagining how a ghostly yet specific model like “[a] single “teacher’s” “students,” flung out into the world” might acquire real world political consequences.¹⁷⁹ If a recent preview in The New York Times of an upcoming Irish theatre festival in New York is any indication, then this trend stands to be vindicated, “Ireland is changing...These plays need to be seen because there is a whole global thing happening. If the Irish are grappling with an American-type dream

¹⁷⁷ Gayatri Spivak, “Schmitt and Poststructuralism: A Response,” *Cardozo Law Review*, Vol 21 (1999-2000), p. 1729.

¹⁷⁸ Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 10-11.

¹⁷⁹ Spivak, “Schmitt and Poststructuralism,” 1730.

of success, still there are a lot of people that is not happening to [...] Ireland has been blessed with rapid, bewildering challenges in recent years, and drama is guiding the conversation [...] The End of Lines playwrights come from Dublin, Cork, County Clare, Belfast and Derry (three are from Northern Ireland), and none write anything that evokes the misty Yeatsian image of Celtic Twilight.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Gwen Orel, “Theater Festival Presents New Voices From a New Ireland,” New York Times, Sep 1, 2008.

IV. The Politics of Translation and the Poetics of (Epic) Storytelling in David Edgar's *Pentecost*

David Edgar's *Pentecost* was first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Other Place in Stratford-upon-Avon on 12th October, 1994 before moving to the Young Vic theatre in London in May 1995. Its North American premiere took place at the Yale Repertory Theatre in November 1995. *Pentecost* is the second of Edgar's 'East European Trilogy,' making its appearance between *The Shape of the Table* (1990) and *The Prisoner's Dilemma* (2001). As a recent profile in *The Guardian* states, "...while other left-wing writers of his generation, such as Trevor Griffiths and Howard Brenton, were demoralised and enervated by the fall of communism in 1989, Edgar rose to the challenge with plays such as *Pentecost* that explored the ideological vacuum left behind."¹⁸¹ Perhaps best known for his Tony-award winning theatrical adaptation of Charles Dickens' novel *Nicholas Nickleby* for a nine-hour two-part performance in 1980 Edgar, however, has repeatedly engaged with contemporary political conditions throughout his career whether in earlier plays like *Destiny* (1976) and *Maydays* (1983) that scrutinized the political positioning of the Right and the Left respectively in Britain, or more recent plays like *Continental Divide* (2003), his two-play cycle [Mothers

¹⁸¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2004/mar/20/theatre.politicaltheatre>

Against and Daughters of the Revolution] examining the American political process through the lens of a gubernatorial election. The idea for an art-historical whodunit-meets-political hostage drama that finally became *Pentecost* came to Edgar on a visit to Prague shortly after the premiere of *The Shape of the Table*. “When I was there,” he says “... I went to a church that was being restored, and there I had the idea: what if they found something, a lost work of art, perhaps, behind the wall?” echoing the fortunes of the hidden fresco on the church wall at the center of the play.¹⁸² The play opens with local ‘National Museum’ curator Gabriella Pecs and visiting British art historian Oliver Davenport entering “an abandoned church of the Romanesque period” in a small village outside the capital city of “an unnamed south east European country.” The time is late-evening and Gabriella, evidently, has persuaded Oliver to take a brief detour on his way to a high profile dinner meeting with the country’s Minister of Culture, renamed recently, we are informed, the “Minister for Restoration of [our] National Monuments.” As we shortly learn from the opening lines, Gabriella is very excited about her discovery of the above-mentioned fresco depicting the ‘Lamentation of Christ,’ hidden behind a “large heroic revolutionary mural,” on the wall of the church and wants Oliver’s expert opinion as a confirmation of its artistic merit, and consequent need for possible restoration. “Although stylistically Byzantine,” Edgar tells us in the introductory note “the painting is compositionally clearly very similar to Giotto’s Lamentation in the Arena Chapel, Padua....,” thereby contributing to the art-historical mystery at the center of the play. Gabriella speaks a broken English (“...if I

¹⁸² Edgar’s notes for the drafts of *Pentecost* also record an alternative version of this event.

am right that painting with perspective kind of painted before Giotto born, then I think I make pretty damn substantial finding here”), like most of the other Slavic characters (and later, the refugees) in the play. This is a dramaturgical technique Edgar, as we shall see later, uses remarkably well to invoke a certain multilingualism and, more importantly for our present purpose, translation in the text of theatre, but it seems to be a common practice among contemporary British playwrights when it comes to their ‘East European plays’ as evidenced by the use of similar techniques by Caryl Churchill in her *Mad Forest* (1990) set in post-Ceausescu Romania.¹⁸³ While one can always argue that such usage of English can elicit patronizing responses from audiences who are primary speakers of the language, it definitely provides the occasion to reflect on the specificity of the theatrical response to the political and cultural situation of post-communist Eastern Europe; one that attempts to foreground the role of translation and challenge the prevalent monolingualism in drama and theatre.

From the very first scene of *Pentecost* Edgar seeks to create a polyglot text that weaves together multiple languages following a convention he had outlined in this detailed staging note at the beginning of the play:

All characters speak the languages they know, whether their own or indeed English. For information, I have identified the languages and given English translations of the non-English speeches (printed in square brackets and not intended to be spoken).

In this text, the non-Roman script languages are phonetically

¹⁸³ Caryl Churchill, *Mad Forest: A Play from Romania* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1991).

transliterated, as is the Polish...The language of 'our country' is in fact Bulgarian, though Bulgaria is not 'our country'.

The transliteration is intended to render the languages in a form that will be accessible to actors, to convey the equivalent sounds of the letters than their correct orthography.

While the appearance, as a result, of multiple languages and different orthographies on the page in *Pentecost* already disturbs the mostly monolingual materiality of drama in print, there are more things to be said about the texturing of the play – for instance, the diegetic presence of copious comments and quotations from scholarly books and news media in the printed text – that might contribute to a rethinking of the relationship between staged theatre and printed drama.¹⁸⁴ Disseminating the scene in sounding letters can also invoke here the rebus or charade as in Freud's dream-work.¹⁸⁵ But, for the purpose of demonstrating some of the central claims of my argument in this chapter I would now turn to the unique storytelling scene at the heart of the play.

In terms of dramatic action, at the end of the first scene we have arrived at the following teasing suggestion: if Gabriella's conclusions about the painting – based on cryptic references about its existence in the country's twelfth-century national epic poem written in a language long proscribed, and a later, detailed appraisal in excerpts from a letter written by an Italian spy in the fifteenth century – are proven correct then

¹⁸⁴ See Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998) for a discussion of the changing relationship between modern drama and the history of print.

¹⁸⁵ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 246-91.

the Lamentation scene painted on the church wall with its use of perspective and depiction of life-like figures not only predates Giotto's revolutionary frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua painted around 1305, but is poised to revise the history of modern Western art of the last 600 years. Four scenes and a plot-twist later, "shortly before dawn," as the scene direction suggests, we find ourselves looking into the church "lit with candles and the dying fires on which food has been cooked and round which HOSTAGES and REFUGEES are sat to keep warm... There is some nervousness in the air." After a few stories have been shared by some of her fellow refugees presumably as a way to lighten things up Tunu, a young Sri Lankan woman "comes forward with her story." Having left her native country in search of work, she is currently on the run from abusive former employers in places like Kuwait and Cyprus. The rest of the compelling even if slightly improbable group consists of asylum seekers in the wake of the turbulent geopolitics of the contiguous regions of the former Soviet Union, the 'Balkans' and the 'Middle East.'¹⁸⁶ Tunu's audience also happens to include our two art experts - Gabriella and Oliver Davenport - who have now been joined by American art historian Leonard Katz. They were already inside the church, debating and discussing the merits and possible futures of the art work on its wall when the group of refugees stormed in, and subsequently turned the former into 'hostages' as indicated in the scene direction above. The proposal for a restoration of the fresco, advocated by Gabriella and Oliver, had already become contentious given a series of conflicts of interest ranging

¹⁸⁶ Although the United Nations have recently moved to replace Eurocentric political designations like 'the Middle East' with 'Western Asia' and the EU has started referring to 'the Balkans' as 'South Eastern Europe,' these terms are still widely in use in academic and popular venues. I have placed them within quotation marks to highlight the instability of such naming.

from local political factions to global academic rivalries that were unfolding over a work of art in the age of post-Cold War identity politics in Europe. For instance, on the one hand, representatives from the two dominant local churches, the Catholic and the Orthodox, strongly disagreed over the fate of what they clearly perceived to be an object of religious rather than artistic significance, and on the other, serious intellectual and ethical differences persisted between two competing schools of thought in art historical practice: those who favored the restoration of endangered works of art (Oliver) and those who insisted on the non-interventionist method of preservation (Leo). With the sudden arrival of the refugees on this already contested scene and the subsequent hostage crisis, the initial project of artistic restoration was now faced with a new uncertainty. However, a more fundamental uncertainty was set in motion once Tunu began to narrate her story. Unlike her preceding storytellers in Polish, and English broken as well as fluent, Tunu's telling was completely incomprehensible to her audience since nobody present in that church spoke a word of Sinhalese, and thus came to precipitate a crisis of communication within the world of the text. What Edgar stages through the crisis of communication in this scene can be understood as a literal instantiation of the aporia that marks all processes of constituting shared, intersubjective meaning; the idea that communication is always distorted, never adequate or even linear, thus inhibiting the process of constituting social collectivities.¹⁸⁷ What is more interesting for my purpose, however, is his attempt to

¹⁸⁷ I draw upon Jacques Derrida's articulation of the notion of how "we are caught up, one and another, in a sort of heteronomic and dissymmetrical curving of social space—more precisely a curving of the relation to the other" in *Politics of Friendship* trans. George Collins (New York: Verso, 1997), 23, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's

come up with a literary-dramatic resolution to this political-ethical problem. Here is an extract from Edgar's scene directions, intended perhaps as a diegetic intervention to resolve a crisis in the mimetic order of things in the text at the moment when Tunu begins to speak:

Tunu's story is initially incomprehensible as no-one but her speaks her language. But gradually, through a kind of collective reading of the story, supplemented by Tunu's own hints, confirmations, corrections and echoes of the other STORYTELLERS' gestural language – for 'king', 'expedition', 'capture', going into a forest, giving a gift and so on – the story emerges and becomes clear.¹⁸⁸ (emphasis added)

What we see in the above extract, I argue, is the playwright's attempt to resolve the problem of incomprehension and consequent failure of collectivity through the use of translation ("hints, confirmations, corrections and echoes" of the original) as a dramatic technique ("gestural language") in the play. A dramatic technique that aspires to the political-ethical task of "co-ordinat[ing] into existence a new [collective] subject" in the theatre, somewhat similar to the ethical-political task that at least one contemporary critic has also claimed for a new comparative literature discipline.¹⁸⁹ The "gestural language" is, in fact, a "trace" of languaging without the guarantee of historical sign-

discussion of how "The law of curvature – that one cannot access another directly and with a guarantee... - is not a deterrent to politics" in *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 30.

¹⁸⁸ *Pentecost*, 86. Italics added. On the diegetic function assumed by stage directions in the printed text of modern drama see Martin Puchner, *Stagefright: Modernism, Anti-theatricality and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

¹⁸⁹ R. Radhakrishnan, "Why Compare?" *New Literary History* 40.3 (2009): 453-471.

systems, an expansion of the terrain of collectivizing. My reading of *Pentecost* turns on the crucial act of what Edgar calls “collective reading” staged in this scene, and consists of two broad interrelated arguments: First, I propose that the act of collective reading staged in *Pentecost* is primarily an act of translation that is enabled by the dramatic technique of the play. While this strategy is most evident in the storytelling scene, it is also consolidated through the consistent staging of translation as a literary-dramatic device of foreshadowing throughout the play leading up to its climax and denouement. In the rest of this chapter I will attempt to explore the many registers on which the figure of translation operates in the text: in the texture of the play including its language and dialogue, as the most important plot device which eventually solves the art historical mystery at the heart of the play, as literary metaphor for a geopolitical situation where the positioning of ‘the Balkans’ with respect to ‘Europe’ might be understood on the model of translation’s relationship to its supposed original etc. A brief extract here from the storytelling scene will probably help to illustrate my main point and set up the argument about a dramatic technique figured in translation. As the female proletarian migrant from the Global South, Tunu’s character is probably singular in so far as she occupies the position of “no-one but her,” unable to make herself understood even among the fellow displaced at the borders of Europe. This singularity of the narrator, however, is contrasted with the universality of Tunu’s narration, the retelling of an ancient epic poem (the Ramayana) that reveals her emplacement within a vast cultural geography and an enduring collectivity of listeners and interlocutors. I will take up this point for further discussion later in the chapter. Here, now, is Tunu

beginning to tell her story in Sinhalese while her listeners attempt to translate – decipher/decode and interpret – the narrative through what Edgar calls “collective reading.”

TUNU. Ékamath éka rataka, hitiya Dhasharartha kiyayala hungak
 balasampanne rajathunék [Once upon a time there lived a very
 powerful king called Dhasharartha]

GRIGORI. King

TUNU. Unwahanséta hitiya bisawak, mé bisawa hungak papuru,
 ahankara ganiyek. [His highness had a wife, who was a cruel
 and conceited woman.]

MARINA. Tsarevna

AMIRA. (Russian). Zhestokaya. [Malicious.]¹⁹⁰

Invoking the gesture for the figure of a ‘king’ in a previous storyteller’s account or projecting a ‘cruel and conceited’ queen onto the figure of a ‘malicious’ ‘Tsarevna’ by Russian speakers Marina and Amira here help to communicate Tunu’s narrative by employing what are some of the familiar moves of literary translation: following precedence where acceptable, or approximating/ improvising to represent the different and the foreign. But Edgar, I suggest, extends the province of translation by socializing the act instead of valorizing the familiar figure of the solitary translator. And this brings us to the second half of my argument: While the act of collective reading can be

¹⁹⁰ *Pentecost*, 86.

understood as an act of translation, as I have already proposed, the collective in question did not exist as a pre-constituted group – the refugees did not even know of each other’s names and origins till they reached the abandoned church – but was formed in and by the act of reading-as-translation. I would like to argue that the key to understanding the formation of such non-essentialist collectivity in this act of reading lies in the staging of translation as a relation of sociality, where the social, to adapt Brecht’s succinct description of the functioning of the ‘story’ in theatre, is made up of “what happens between people.”¹⁹¹ My attempt, however, is to introduce new grounds for the consolidation of such sociality, and I would like to offer the notion of ‘incomprehensibility,’ the inability of communication and meaning to transpire as a possible terrain for rethinking the formation of the social. My contention about translation and collectivity shares in Naoki Sakai’s argument about “incomprehensibility [being] essentially a matter of sociality” put forward in his recent writings on translation.¹⁹² Sakai maintains that:

“...it is rather misleading to claim that “comprehensibility” demonstrates social connectedness between people while “incomprehensibility” expresses the lack of social connection. For a situation of incomprehension to take place there must be a relation between people. If

¹⁹¹ Bertolt Brecht, “Short Organum for the Theatre,” in *Brecht on Theatre* ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 200.

¹⁹² Naoki Sakai has been working towards such a theory of translation from the time of his early book *Translation and Subjectivity* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). I quote here from what is probably the latest presentation of his evolving thoughts on translation in the article “Translation as a filter” published in *Transeuropeennes: International Journal of Critical Thought*, March 25, 2010. [http://www.transeuropeennes.eu/en/articles/200/Translation_as_a_filter]

“comprehensibility” simply expresses a situation in which communication is accomplished, “incomprehensibility” must also be a situation in which communication occurs.”¹⁹³

I would therefore argue that politically expedient insights about the formation of the social could be gained from reorienting the staging of translation in *Pentecost* on grounds of incomprehensibility, in place of the assumption of a universalizing comprehension espoused by traditional theories of translation and seemingly adopted by Edgar in his dramaturgy. In a play that ends in a tragic and violent failure of communication, I would redirect our attention towards restaging and reimagining the collective subject figured at precisely those instances in the text that are marked by an enabling failure of comprehension and/or a productive inadequacy of translation. While my argument holds true for many situations throughout the play, the story telling scene, I submit, presents itself as the most compelling instance of such restaging in *Pentecost*. The rest of the chapter is structured along two broad trajectories of reading which, while carrying their distinctive critical burden do not always follow each other in a linear progression: one, engaging critically with current interpretations of the play to examine their strengths and limitations in fostering our understanding of the text, and the other, exploring new openings and closings in the text that have so far largely escaped critical attention.

It is with this backdrop that we return to the story telling scene, which occurs midway through the second and final act of the play. The intervening scenes are mostly

¹⁹³ Sakai, 2010.

taken up with the articulation of disputes between a variety of groups and individuals regarding the two main courses of action: either 'conservation' that would leave the painting, more or less untouched, on the church wall, or its restoration by relocating it to the country's National Museum. The debate seemed to have been finally settled with Leo having convincingly demonstrated to a presiding magistrate and representatives of the local Catholic and Orthodox churches that the painting was probably only a copy of Giotto completed much later than the twelfth century and hence in less need of urgent restoration. Leo was, in fact, in the middle of a heated exchange with Gabriella who had just accused him (as well as Oliver) of revealing themselves to be the predictably arrogant and insensitive 'Western' scholars with no understanding of the historical and cultural predicament of Eastern Europe when, all of a sudden, the refugees stormed into the church. Demanding asylum and possible permission to work in countries of 'the West' this motley multilingual group represented the detritus of the Cold War, victims of ethnic and geopolitical upheavals in the border regions of Europe and Asia: an Azeri (Raif, a disabled veteran of the Soviet military expedition in Afghanistan, who having lost his family in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict had a run-in with the dreaded Chechen mafia when trying to earn a decent living on his own), an armed Afghan (Abdul, possibly an ex-Taliban but whose political loyalties have become confused in contemporary Afghanistan consequently endangering his life), two Russians (Grigori, and Marina, who, although she has lived in Latvia for more than half her life has still been denied citizenship there), women from Bosnia (Amira), Turkish Kurdistan (Fatima), and Kuwait (Palestinian Yasmin who was currently stateless, and

Sri Lankan Tunu who had initially fled from her job as a maid with an abusive family in Kuwait City only to end up as an exotic dancer in a club in Cyprus), Bosnian Roma (Nico, his teenage daughter Cleopatra and her baby, whom they are ready to sell “to good family in western country. With good price”), and a Mozambican university student from Moscow (Antonio) who, having faced racist aggression from his fellow Russian students, eviction from a squatter camp outside Paris that was destroyed to make space for the new National Library and deportation, for some inexplicable reason, to Poland in that order was trying once again to emigrate to a safer place. By the beginning of Act Two Scene Six, the tense relationship between the refugees and their hostages had eased up a little with Leo even offering to help write a statement demanding asylum, while Amira came over to speak with the hostages and also show them pictures of her family. Elsewhere in the church, Raif and Abdul began sharing jokes that soon drew everyone into a full-fledged storytelling session. From Amira’s story about a king who leaves his three daughters behind to go off to war via Nico’s variation on it in Polish replacing the king with a woodcutter eventually sliding into references from the space expedition in the hugely popular American science fiction television series Star Trek “boldly going where no man had gone before in...” to Antonio’s African parable of imperialist adventure, successive narrators seemed to share competing versions of what increasingly resembled the same story involving the primary trope of an eventful journey, communicated through the combined effort of bilingual speakers and stock gestures. Here are some short illustrative extracts from the many retellings:

AMIRA. OK. I hear it differently. I hear it not ordinary woodchopper. But
King.

And not ordinary son, but hero.

MARINA (Russian). Shto praiskhodit? [What's happening?]

NICO (Polish): Królewcz wyjeżdza w daleka podrósz. (Kroolevich viyezhdzha v
dalekan podroozh.) [There is a king's son going on a journey.]

MARINA (enthusiastically). Ah. Tsaryevich.

AMIRA: Wielka wyprawa...(Vyelka viprava...) [A great expedition...]

NICO. Smiale lecic tam gdzie nikogo jescze nie bylo, w - (Smayale lechich
tam gdzhe nikogo yeschche nye biwo v-) [boldly going where no man
had gone before in -]

GRIGORI. I think he say -

NICO. - Starship Enterprise.

ANTONIO. OK. No starship. But small village, central Africa. And it is World
War Two and an aircraft officer, let us say from England, is shot down
and parachutes down in the village...

Tunu's story in Sinhalese, although incomprehensible to everyone, turned out to be the
most elaborate.

Any discussion of the staging of translation as a social relation in *Pentecost* would invariably invoke the obvious images of collectivity associated with the two Biblical episodes referenced in the text: the story of the Tower of Babel, and the cataclysmic event of “Pentecost” referred to in the play’s title when the Holy Spirit reappeared to the Apostles and miraculously empowered their tongues so that they could be simultaneously understood by a diverse and multilingual group of potential converts. A few perceptive critics, however, have questioned some of the assumptions underlying these images, most significantly Edgar’s apparent staging of European particularism-masquerading-as-universalism, and the play’s favored theory of translation. Stanton Garner, for instance, traces the play’s residual European universalism precisely in its counter-universalist gesture of “a fully hybridized rewriting of Europe as an arena of cultural encounter.”¹⁹⁴ He substantiates his observations about how *Pentecost* “reinscribes some of the tenets of Enlightenment humanism even as [it] seeks to displace its Eurocentric lineage” with examples like this comment made by Oliver when faced with the prospect of the refugees using the painting as leverage to bargain a safe passage, “Perhaps there are universal human values which we should protect. From those who threaten them.”¹⁹⁵ For Janelle Reinelt, on the other hand, the problem does not seem to lie so much in the play’s legitimation of Enlightenment claims by reversal as in its gesture towards utopian politics,

¹⁹⁴ Stanton Garner, “Rewriting Europe: *Pentecost* and the Crossroads of Migration,” *Essays in Theatre/Études théâtrales*, Vol. 16, No. 1, November 1997, 11.

¹⁹⁵ Garner, “Rewriting Europe,” 1997, 11.

particularly in the story telling scene where “it forms the utopian horizon of a vision of an inclusive, harmonious, polyglot Europe.”¹⁹⁶ The theme of positing utopias relates to the second major critical concern – the theory of translation espoused by the text. While Garner, continuing his earlier argument, faults Edgar for revealing a “faith in a kind of extra-linguistic channel of experience that surmounts the fact of difference...” by enabling Tunu’s story in Sinhalese to bridge the barrier of incomprehensibility through “a kind of collective reading...supplemented by ...hints, confirmations, corrections and echoes of the other Storytellers’ gestural language,” Jenny Spencer is critical of Edgar’s belief in “a traditional theory of translation...[which relies upon] notions of universality and the possibility of linguistic equivalence” most evident in Edgar’s use of “the Pentecostal metaphor [that] translates a utopian socialist possibility of human community undivided by language, nationality and class interests.”¹⁹⁷

What is common to these astute critiques of the play, it seems, is their objection to the particular notion of translation (traditional, universalist, capable of producing linguistic equivalence and consequently meaning) that Edgar seemingly employs as a means to foster comprehension, and eventually bring about an essentialist collectivity surmounting all manner of difference (e.g. ‘a fully hybridized’ New Europe, socialist utopia etc.). Focusing exclusively on the problems of translation, on its presumed transparency as the instrument of politics such readings, however, leave out from their

¹⁹⁶ Janelle Reinelt, “Performing Europe: Identity Formation for a ‘New’ Europe,” *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 3 (2001), 379.

¹⁹⁷ Jenny Spencer, “Performing Translation in Contemporary Anglo-American Drama,” *Theatre Journal* 59 (2007), 398-99.

discussions the process of the formation of the social, the end of politics so to say. My argument, by contrast, positions itself at the 'end' not as a simple reversal but as a vantage point for generating fuller, more complex insights into the conception of the 'means,' i.e. starting from a rethinking of sociality as the desired political goal to arrive, working backwards, at a restaging of translation as dramatic technique figured in the play. Drawing upon Sakai's ideas I argue that the formation of collectivity in *Pentecost*, always contingent, is based on incomprehensibility where the latter constitutes a social relation between people who hold in common not only their experience of failed communication with and inadequate understanding of each other as the consequence of a translation that turns out to be "inevitable but also impossible,"¹⁹⁸ but also the gesture of saying, "'let me try to understand you" [which] is from the very beginning something collective, something co-eval."¹⁹⁹ In place of a straightforward straightening of the curvature that is the structure of social communication, always non-linear, never directly accessible, then, incomprehensibility. Sakai in effect argues for the trace when faced with a situation of incomprehension:

"...I look for common terms, fragments of some [shared] colonial heritage...and pursue the possibility of communal work through non-linguistic texts like gestures or maps...What one attempts to gain by this method is neither the original meaning nor the correct interpretation. It is

¹⁹⁸ Samuel Weber, "A Touch of Translation: On Walter Benjamin's "Task of the Translator"" in Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood eds. *Nation, Language and the Ethics of Translation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 71.

¹⁹⁹ Sakai, 2010.

simply a way of turning incomprehensibility into a kind of
comprehensibility.”²⁰⁰ [emphasis added]

What is staged as translation in the storytelling scene in *Pentecost* is therefore not just a failure but this ‘gesture’ that while not necessarily producing “the original meaning nor the correct interpretation” nevertheless turns “incomprehensibility into a kind of comprehensibility.”²⁰¹ If the constitution of collectivity is reconceptualized in this manner, then translation, its political instrument is also consequently rearticulated. This time by foregrounding the idea of incomprehensibility, which though repressed by Edgar in the interest of preserving the idea of a collective formed through perfect transparency of communication, always already forms one half of the double bind that governs all translation – necessity/impossibility. Translation, a non-traditional theory would thus argue, could always take on board the notion of incomprehensibility; it was the concept of the social, predicated on transparent communication and full comprehension as its condition of possibility, which needed to be reoriented around the notion of incomprehensibility. It is *Pentecost’s* refusal to engage with this task that leads to the positing of a collective in the act of reading as translation in the text whose concerted efforts at decoding Tunu’s incomprehensible story in Sinhalese “supplemented by Tunu’s own hints, confirmations, corrections and echoes of the other STORYTELLERS’ gestural language” are ultimately shown to be successful. A particularly telling example where the staging of translation as staging

²⁰⁰ Sakai, 2010.

²⁰¹ Sakai, 2010.

incomprehensibility is immediately followed by an attempted dramatic resolution in the interest of preserving the identity of the group occurs at the point when everyone wrongly assumes that Tunu's story has ended, only to be corrected soon after:

TUNU. Visala yuddhayakate pasuwe Rama saha Ravana moonate moona hambawuna. Namuth éka oluwak angin wénwénakota thavath oluwak Ravana rajugé kandin mathuwénawa. Anthimata, Rama éyayge vidya balaya athi eethalaya aragéna Ravana rajuwe marumuwate pathkela. Yuddayen pasuwa Rama saha Sita navatha ekathuvuna. [After a terrible and bloody battle, Rama and Ravana finally engage in mortal combat. But, to his dismay, Rama finds that every time he manages to lop one of Ravana's many heads off another grows in its place. But then Rama remembers his magic arrow – and shoots Ravana dead. And after the battle Rama and Sita are reunited.]

MOST PEOPLE respond as if this was the end; a smattering of applause.

TUNU. Namuth, Rama, Sita ayagé pathivata rekagéna hitiyé né kiyala séka pahalakéruwa. [But Rama doubts Sita's faith.]

The LISTENERS look blank, and whisper questions to each other.

MARIA. (Russian). Shto ana gavarit? [What is she saying?]

GRIGORI. (Russian). Yan ye znayoo. [I don't know.]

TUNU. Sita mégana dukwéla, visala ginimaleyak gahala ginnata péna.

Namuth aya pichchune né. Mokadha, aya thamungé pathivata

rékagéna hitapu nisa. [Sita, hugely saddened by his distrust of her, makes herself a pyre and throws herself upon it. But because she has been faithful she doesn't burn.]

AMIRA. I think – Rama doubt if Sita faithful during her captivity.

TUNU nods.

AMIRA. And so to prove she build great fire and throw herself within. But she suffers no harm.

TUNU nods.

TUNU. Ithin anthimata, Rama saha Sita, thamangé ratatte gos hondin rajakamkela. [And so in the end Rama and Sita return to claim their kingdom and live happily for all eternity.]

The moment of incomprehension expressed in the scene directions (“The LISTENERS look blank, and whisper questions to each other”) as well as in the dialogue (by MARIA – “What is she saying?” and GRIGORI – “I don’t know.”), threatens a crisis of communication and consequently collectivity formation within the text of drama; but, it is promptly resolved by Amira stepping in with her translation, prefaced by a feeble dramatic gesture of “I think...” It is interesting that critics like Garner, Reinelt and Spencer fault Edgar for facilitating conversation across difference when the play eventually seems to end in a failure of communication. My reading, in fact, takes up the fact of the seeming failure of translation in Pentecost and attempts to restage it on different grounds in order to expand the significance of translation and look for a more redeeming political instrument in its workings. What existing critiques of collectivity

formation in Pentecost therefore fail to note, and this is something they inadvertently share with the playwright, is this: incomprehensibility and inadequacy of staged translation or unresolved difference, even when they are not problematically resolved and surmounted in the text, does not necessarily entail a failure of the social; in fact, incomprehensibility can be thought of as a social relation itself thereby reterritorializing the grounds of staging translation.

Epic (in) Theatre

Two points in the critiques mentioned above still need to be addressed: Garner's objection to Edgar's use of what he calls "extra-linguistic channel of experience" in the storytelling scene, and Reinelt and Spencer's skepticism about the projection of utopia as a political horizon in the play; however, I would like to stay a little longer with Tunu's story here before taking up these critiques again. Even though it is told in 'incomprehensible' Sinhalese Tunu's story, interestingly, is the only one narrated in its entirety in the play. Critics, however, have mostly mentioned it in passing as one of many stories about the themes of journey, exile etc being shared in that scene, with only in one instance describing it as "the Hindu tale of Rama and Sita."²⁰² What seems to have escaped critical attention is the fact that this seemingly unremarkable tale of exile and return is nothing but a gist of the likely Sinhalese version of the ancient Indian epic

²⁰² Garner, "Rewriting Europe," 1997.

poem Ramayana.²⁰³ A lingering ethnocentrism in contemporary American theatre criticism might be at fault here but for my reading, 'epic' is the operative word, and Edgar, contrary to his professed intention of simply dramatizing a Babel-like situation as noted in earlier drafts of the play, might be onto something more interesting than just being inclusive in his representation of gendered marginality. Specifically, I want to argue that by invoking the epic narration of the Ramayana within the text of the play Edgar offers us a different locus of and an alternative point of entry into the staging of translation and collectivity in *Pentecost*. Such a reading not only weaves together the subtext of epic references scattered throughout the play, eventually contributing towards solving the mystery of the unattributed fresco on the church wall, but also generates many interesting insights into the formal organization of the text: it produces a richer understanding of the story telling scene as an occasion for a comparative reflection on genres – oral epic and drama and theatre – while constantly keeping the performative dimension of the latter in sight; through its emphasis on the staging of an oral epic and highlighting the analogous structural characteristics it shares with the operation of translation, such a reading offers another gloss on the workings of translation as dramatic technique in the play; and finally, it can broaden our approach towards thinking collectivity vis-à-vis *Pentecost* by resituating the inquiry away from

²⁰³ The cultural geography of the *Ramayana* extends far beyond its numerous regional, religious, linguistic and folk versions that exist within India and includes countries like Mongolia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, the Philippines and Sri Lanka all of which have thriving literary-performative traditions depicting the epic poem. A much-anthologized essay by A. K. Ramanujan on the topic is "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation," first published in 1985-86. For other scholarly surveys see V. Raghavan ed. *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1980), K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar ed. *Asian Variations in Ramayana* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1983), A. K. Mandakranta Bose ed. *The Ramayana Revisited* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

the obvious Marxist-Socialist imaginary within a pre-modern/classical framework, may be even an earlier moment of globalization with memories of pluralistic and heterogeneous ways of living.

The first reference to an epic poem in *Pentecost* occurs when Gabriella, trying to substantiate her art find to Oliver, mentions the following:

GABRIELLA. ...Now it is no surprise I think to find our country has great national patriotic poem.

OLIVER. None at all.

GABRIELLA. And in fourth canto famous legend about traveller journeying to Persia, who arrive in little village twenty leagues from Zabocz. And traveller made captive - what in old Nagolitic called 'involuntary guest' - and he is threaten even that he will be quite beheaded. But when sword is raise he promise if he will be spared he give to village gift much greater than his life. And to prove take up brush and paint on church wall painting of Christ's followers and Virgin mourning Christ so natural and real its figures seem to live and breathe. And so they say he keep his bargain and they let him go...²⁰⁴

The national epic poem mentioned above was composed, we are told in the course of the play, in the now extinct Nagolitic language "no later than 1220." Giotto started

²⁰⁴ *Pentecost*, 7.

painting the frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua in 1305. The painting mentioned in the national epic was presumed to be destroyed in Turkish raids in 1392. However, a letter written in Italian by Leonello Vegni, a merchant visiting from Padua, and a report of his trial, being accused of spying, recorded in Slavic dating from around 1425 both contain descriptions of a painting very similar to the one unearthed by Gabriella in the church. In fact, as Oliver discovers, Vegni's letter, aware of the national epic poem, also mentions the remarkable fact of witnessing a supposed copy of Giotto that might have existed before the time of Giotto! It is on the basis of this cumulative evidence that Gabriella, and eventually Oliver, argue for the antiquity of the extant painting and the consequent need for its relocation and restoration suggesting that far from being a copy painted from memory or second hand description, it probably predates Giotto and his influential style in Western art by at least one hundred and fifty years. The national epic, once again, appears to serve as the genre par excellence to "inspire cultural definition and self-definition."²⁰⁵

Complications arise when Leo Katz, the American art historian and a staunch advocate of the anti-restoration and pro-conservation school of thought who was invited by the Orthodox church as expert witness, questions the provenance of the painting. Leo's stance on the matter of art restoration has been foreshadowed in this brief, earlier exchange with Father Bojovic of the Orthodox Church:

LEO. Well, it's a hard shot. Their dating seems improbable, to say the

²⁰⁵ Margaret Beissinger, Jane Tylus and Susanne Wofford eds. *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), "Introduction," 2.

least. But it could be right. It's tough to call.

Pause.

BOJOVIC. I must say, it is refreshing to hear scholar who confess he does not know.

LEO. Well, we've hardly anything to go on. Only one percent of Byzantine paintings have come down to us. So we're thrown back on the documents, which are themselves fragmentary, subject to misquotation, mistranslation, printing errors...

BOJOVIC. Ah yes. Sometime I think I must say if this gift of writing is so wonderful. When Catholics come to liberate from Mongol they ban not books but language. It no surprise I think great national poetry and song - work which stretch out to embrace a people's soul - is pass on not by eye but ear...

His subsequent skepticism about the accuracy of Gabriella and Oliver's claims for the painting based on references in the national epic poem build upon some of these earlier points as evidenced in the extract quoted below:

LEO. - Great National Patriotic Song.

OLIVER. Indeed.

LEO. Remind me. Which edition did you use?

OLIVER. I'm sorry. Which edition?

LEO. Or rather, which transcription?

OLIVER. Which transcription?

OLIVER turns to Gabriella, who remains looking steadfastly away. BOJOVIC looks smug.

LEO. OK. Let's run this through. The thing is apparently first actually written down, by monks, in 1350. Intriguingly, not in the language of its composition, the use of which becomes a capital offence in twelve hundred eighty five. So what we have here, people, is a plan to stick – not wrap – but stick a canvas bandage on the painting, hammer it all over with a rubber mallet, then force metal bars around the edges and then lever all or some of it away –

LEO. – On the basis of the absolute reliability of a transcription and translation of a memorially reported song, as to the existence and description of a work of art completed, what? a hundred and fifty years before? [emphasis added]

What the above scene seems to question in terms of the “reliability of a transcription and translation of a memorially reported song” is, in other words, the reception and interpretation of the oral epic. Whether intended by Edgar or not, there is undeniably some irony in this declamation given that the oral epic in the Balkans/South Eastern Europe has enjoyed a particular preeminence in the study of epics and folklore, both Homeric and beyond. After all, it was the live epic tradition of South Slavic songs that offered Milman Parry and Albert Lord the crucial insights during their field work in the

1930s, which would later go on to form the theory of Oral-Formulaic composition, arguably the most influential theory for understanding epic performances put forward in the twentieth century.²⁰⁶ In fact, Bulgarian (or its fictionalized predecessor Nagolitic dramatized in Pentecost), belongs to the same South Slavic group of languages as Serbo-Croatian, the language of the Gusleri epic songs studied by Parry and Lord in former Yugoslavia. Father Bojovic's comment to Leo about the national epic poem/song – "It is sung to gusle, our great national instrument, by medieval troubadour." – further brings home the correspondence I have been trying to articulate.

Recent studies of the oral and literary epic have attempted to "provide a new interpretive frame for the literary epic ... [and] place contemporary work in oral epic within a broader poetics," while emphasizing the need for producing comparative literary studies that would "make the political and culturally specific more visible."²⁰⁷ Such readings, even when they are operating with a comparative framework, necessarily work with and against the assumption that while 'western' epics like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have long existed in written form, 'non-western' epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are more definitively oral in nature due to their extant traditions of performance; Parry and Lord's theory of oral composition therefore specifically performs a task of reclaiming the obscured origins of the 'western' epic in the oral. A volume on contemporary reappraisals of the epic has, in fact, proposed the

²⁰⁶ See *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*, collected by Milman Parry, ed. & trans. Albert Lord (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), and John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

²⁰⁷ Beissinger, Tylus and Wofford, 1999, 2-3.

following working definition that attempts to transcend the oral and literary divide that has long marked the approach to the genre where the latter, on account of its tractable and traceable existence in writing has often been thought to be more dependable as literary evidence: “the epic is... a poetic narrative of length and complexity that centers around deeds of significance to the community.”²⁰⁸ But this “separation of the scribal and the performative” within a highly traditional epic canon especially in the wake of the Greco-Roman texts, I would argue, also provides us with an instructive parallel for revisiting the tension between the textual and the performative in drama and theatre.²⁰⁹ The latter, a productive tension in my opinion, has become institutionalized in the apparently different approaches to the study of drama and theatre favored by the disciplines of English Literature or Drama and Theatre Studies on the one hand and Performance Studies on the other. The effects of such compartmentalization, and at times unhappy contestation, are now increasingly being questioned by scholars whose work, in light of influential developments in critical theory, tend to emphasize an equal yet supplementary relationship between text and performance. The story telling scene in an otherwise highly literary drama like *Pentecost* comes to function as the site for such metatheatrical reflection on the performative. The fact that Edgar had substantially reworked the scene – including a brief communal dance sequence involving the refugees to the beat of impromptu drumming by Raif, and the singing of a lament accompanied by Amira’s playing of the cello at the end – at the suggestion of and in

²⁰⁸ Beissinger, Tylus and Wofford, 1999, 2.

²⁰⁹ Beissinger, Tylus and Wofford, 1999, 15.

collaboration with the actors at the RSC during rehearsal only lends more credence to my argument. The significance of the storytelling scene, both in its political-ethical content as well as formal structure is also highlighted by a study like Susan Painter's *Edgar – The Playwright*.²¹⁰ On the basis of interviews that she had conducted with Edgar and Michael Attenborough, an Executive Producer of the RSC, Painter discusses the range of options that Edgar had initially considered for staging the storytelling scene, including the form of a Jacobean masque (inspired as he was by the famous bucolic scene in *The Winters Tale* as a model for the supposedly 'magic-kingdom' like quality attached to the gathering of the refugees), or even an opera. This bold idea of inserting an element of hyper-theatricality at the heart of an otherwise naturalistic drama was later abandoned, surprisingly, at the suggestion of the actors at the RSC.²¹¹ Leo's argument against the veracity of the oral epic as a source text and its eventual refutation by Oliver towards the end of the play allows Edgar to stage the embattled position of the performative oral tradition within an overwhelmingly logocentric discourse. With the staging of the Ramayana story in Sinhalese among other narratives that "[echo] the gestures of proscription, banishment, capture and death," and its seemingly effortless comprehension by the listeners Edgar, I suggest, goes one step further and unequivocally makes visible the felicitous nature of the oral-performative,

²¹⁰ See Susan Painter, *Edgar – The Playwright* (London: Methuen Drama), 149-67.

²¹¹ Painter, 149-67.

not in contestation with but as complementary to the textual in the theatre.²¹² We can guess where the playwright's sympathy lies when the conclusive refutation of Leo's argument by Oliver later in the play turns upon the fact of translation without delegitimizing the sanctity, relevance, or authority of the oral epic. The staging of the *Ramayana*, an oral epic par excellence, in the story telling scene along with the dramatic structure of the scene itself therefore seems to further vindicate the oral/performative dimension of the theatre through the lens of the epic.

Taking a brief detour, this line of argument also addresses Garner's objection to Edgar revealing a "faith in a kind of extra-linguistic channel of experience that surmounts the fact of difference..." by enabling Tunu's story to bridge the barrier of incomprehensibility. I suggest that the "extra-linguistic channel of experience" is nothing but the performative supplementing the mimetic in a characteristic example of what Martin Puchner calls the "the double affiliation of the theater."²¹³ The other accusation of Edgar's allegiance to the ideals of a certain kind of universalism and utopianism, the attainment of which is posed as the task of translation figured in *Pentecost*, is also readily evident even prior to a critical interpretation of the scenes – from the marginalia of numerous provocative quotations which literally frame the printed text of the play in an interesting example of the diegetic containing the mimetic in drama. The quotations, carefully selected from Edgar's extensive research notes, constitute a running and revealing commentary on the play's action, resembling at

²¹² *Pentecost*, 88.

²¹³ Puchner, *Stagefright*, 5.

times the protocols of documentary theatre. Here are two representative examples that precede the first and second acts respectively, and serve to amplify the ethical-political attitudes and politico-historical contexts of his protagonists – in this case the contradictory relationship of desire and derision between ‘Europe’ and ‘the Balkans’:

All those things you experienced in Western Europe – the Renaissance, the Reformation, the eighteenth century Enlightenment and constitutionalism – all these were things we missed because of the Turks.

Sophia University official

The Guardian, 15 February, 1991

I am not willing to risk the lives of German soldiers for countries whose names we cannot spell properly.

Volker Ruhe, German defence minister

December 1992

In fact, I think it is the framing of these somewhat ‘post-European’ events in the play within a pronounced Judeo-Christian narrative much more than a reinscription of Enlightenment ideals as most critics seem to concur that might be construed as limiting for the purpose of imagining newer forms of collectivity. The very first quotation, appearing right after the title page and just above a long extract from Eric Hobsbawm’s

Nations and Nationalism since 1780, comes from the well-known sections of the "Book of Genesis," Chapter Eleven:

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech...And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of the earth.

And the final quotation, which occupies the last printed page of the text and from which I reproduce a short extract below, is from "Act of the Apostles," Chapter Two:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon

each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance...²¹⁴

Framed as I have suggested by the Judeo-Christian narrative of the confounding of language and the miraculous restoration of communication, *Pentecost* nevertheless attempts to reach out to those originary narratives of a 'plural' Europe that have been long obscured in the popular imagination of the continent. It is the story of Babel re-told. As Spivak suggests, faced with the assumption of translatability/commensurability rampant in the translation industry today, the Tower of Babel has now become our refuge.²¹⁵ I will take up this issue of a restrictive imagination of the new European collective subject as well as its subversion as staged in the play a little later in the chapter.

The second point, critiqued by both Reinelt and Spencer, has to do with the idea of positing utopia as the terrain for imagining collectivity in the play – a not-so-unpredictable association given Edgar's Marxist politics. Here, I would like to put forward an argument that can hopefully supplement and complicate the straightforward reading of utopian tendencies in *Pentecost* by directing our attention to the setting of the play. Instead of, or rather as well as identifying an easily discernible ideological motivation in the text and its author it might be productive to place the

²¹⁴ *Pentecost*, 106.

²¹⁵ Spivak argues for this imperative in the present when "Even a good globalization (the failed dream of socialism) requires the uniformity which the diversity of mother-tongues must challenge." See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (forthcoming from Harvard University Press, in 2012).

GABRIELLA. And underneath whitewash, pictures of our saints of orthodox religion.

A little along, she is revealing heads of saints.

Pretty bloody dull, I think.

OLIVER. So this place was orthodox before?

GABRIELLA. When we are Hungary, it Catholic, when we are holy Slavic people, Orthodox. When we have our friendly Turkish visitor who drop by for few hundred years, for while is mosque. When Napoleon pass through, is house for horses.

OLIVER. Stable.

GABRIELLA. Stable, yes...

Here is Gabriella again, in the last scene of the play, thinking aloud in the aftermath of a surprise EU counter-terrorist commando operation that has left many dead among the refugees as well as their hostages, and the fresco completely destroyed:

GABRIELLA. Well. Church. Mosque. Stable. Torture centre. Foodstore. Fortress. Cemetery.

Slight pause.

Middle Europe theme park? Sure.

Such “juxtaposing in a single real place [of] several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible,” is what Foucault attributes to the special category of spaces

he calls “heterotopias.”²¹⁷ The reference to heterotopia, in fact, doubles up in his example of the theater itself as one such space that “brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another.”²¹⁸ While utopias are “fundamentally unreal spaces” that present society either in its perfected form or in its inversion, in Foucault’s order of things heterotopias are real places “that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society ...something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”²¹⁹ The setting of *Pentecost*, a place that is currently a church but has embedded within itself the contested claims of a series of real sites in society ranging from a warehouse to a prison can probably be thought of as one such heterotopic site. The second of the five principles theorized by Foucault for explaining the operation of heterotopias in society i.e. “a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion” might serve to legitimize my intention of complicating but also expanding the scope of the discussion of the relationship between politics and space in *Pentecost*.

Re-Orienting Europe, Again

²¹⁷ Foucault, 1984.

²¹⁸ Foucault, 1984.

²¹⁹ Foucault, 1984.

While critics have argued that Edgar seems to espouse a traditional theory of translation in his staging of the storytelling scene in *Pentecost*, I propose that a more radical understanding of translation as a necessary impossibility can be traced in his foregrounding of the oral epic in the play as a genre that is simultaneously foundational in scope but contingent in form. As we will see, the foundational status of the oral epic on the one hand and the undecidability that marks any act of its transmission or translation on the other, in fact, come together in the final, convincing solution to the mystery of the painting proposed by Oliver. Translation insinuates itself into the debate about the status and future of the work of art as well, a central theme dramatized in *Pentecost*, and evident in such subtle but significant slippage between ‘conservation’ and restoration’:

CZABA. ...My name is Czaba, I am Minister for Conservation of the National Monuments.

OLIVER. I thought that it was ‘restoration’.

CZABA. (he tries the our country word). ‘Zapavane’. Too close to call.

OLIVER. Depending I suppose on what you thought of what had happened to your national culture recently.

CZABA. Well, yes, sure. But our difficulty as I understand that in our country we have now law of Restitution, intending to return all property expropriated by state since 1940 to its rightful owner.

BOJOVIC. Which depend I must say naturally which state.

CZABA. So maybe you see problem. (18)

Without losing sight of this delicate maneuver, we pass on again to the discussion of orality and translation. Along with the unreliable nature of the oral epic poem for the purpose of tracing its history Leo had also pointed out another discrepancy in the painting: it's use of a particular shade of blue, Ultramarine, that according to existing scholarly opinion was unavailable in Europe prior to the middle of the thirteenth century. Oliver, however, arrived at his conclusion through a careful observation of the peculiarities of the languages (and the intersecting faiths) involved almost entirely through casual conversation with Gabriella and some of the refugees – the now extinct Old Nagolitic, and Italian which he already knew. His explanation, glimpsed below, could therefore easily refute the belief that the painting was a copy of Giotto with any inconsistencies attributed to a rendering from memory, and instead suggest a radically different art historical trajectory. After enumerating the possible mistranslation and misrepresentation of similar sounding words in Old Nagolitic and Italian (e.g. 'gobbo' for hunchback in Italian being misunderstood as 'gobbyo' for rock in Nagolitic explaining the possible depiction of a boulder in the fresco where Giotto had painted a huddled figure of a grieving woman), Oliver states, "But for the fact that by the time Giotto painted what he painted, describing anything in your old language was to put it mildly ill-advised." (98). In what follows, I quote at length from the dramatic exchange between Oliver, Leo and Gabriella that convincingly establishes its remarkable origin, only moments before the wall with the fresco is destroyed in an explosion carried out by a counter-terrorism commando unit:

OLIVER. ...You see, the problem is. We have this mindset, still, about the mediaeval period. That everybody knows their places, no-one travels, no-one moves. To each his own walled garden. Whereas actually in medieval Europe was a chaos of diaspora. Every frontier teeming, every crossroads thronged. So it is frankly more than possible that a painter could have set off in the early years of the thirteenth century. From what perils we cannot imagine. And coming to this place, and being taken captive, and offering for his release to paint a picture, here, so akin to nature that its figures seem to live and breathe...And employing for that purpose a particularly vital but as yet unknown deep blue. For the simple reason - that he brought it with him.

LEO. Sorry?

GABRIELLA. Like taxis.

LEO. Taxis?

OLIVER. Yes. Not going to the east, but coming from. Boldly going where no painter went before. [emphasis added]

GABRIELLA doesn't understand.

GABRIELLA. What do you mean, he is - Italian explorer?

OLIVER. No I mean, I think he was an Arab.

LEO. (delicately). An Arab Figurative Painter? Early thirteenth century?

Now OLIVER is on the platform in front of the painting

OLIVER. Yes. Absolutely and precisely so. An Arab colourist, who learns his fresco in the monasteries of Serbia or Macedonia. Who sees the great mosaics of the mighty churches of Constantinople. And who thinks, like any artist, I could do that too. And having thought some more, that he could do it better. But his huge advantage over almost everybody else is not just that he has the classic geometry the Arabs kept alive for the best part of 800 years, nor yet again the optics they hypothesised around the first millennium, but the fact that nobody's explained to him that painters aren't supposed to use them. So he has two eyes, and they tell him things have three dimensions, and he paints the world that way. With all the innocence, that freshness and that rage, we bring to things when we come up against them for the very first - first time.

(98-99)

Oliver's hypothesis in the above extract, about a traveling Arab/Muslim artist being the creator of the fresco, underscores the use of translation as the dramatic technique of Pentecost, implied in its signal role in solving the art historical whodunit at the heart of the play, the mystery residing within the undecidability of the translation of a single word in a pre-modern language that could mean either 'to' or 'from.' It is tempting to think of this almost as a critique of the unidirectional linearity of movement and thought in modernity (as in 'from' something to 'to' something). The hypothesis also sets in motion new possibilities for configuring collectivities in the play. I will elaborate on this shortly but notions of pre-modern collectivities, as I have mentioned earlier, are

also evoked by the representation of the epic in the storytelling scene. The tension between the textual and the performative, the abiding role of the collective in production and reception, and the exigencies of translation are all taken to be constitutive of drama and theatre. Edgar's attempt in *Pentecost*, as I have been trying to argue, is to articulate some of these formal and thematic concerns through their displacement onto the terrain of the oral epic, a genre with which the theatre seems to share many productive affinities. The epic, to revisit the definition I have quoted before, "centers around deeds of significance to the community." And recent scholarship, particularly focusing on live epic traditions like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* performances, as I have already mentioned, have emphasized precisely some of its communal aspects like collective involvement in composition as well as performance to not only argue for the contemporaneity of the genre but also to put pressure on formal certainties of the written epic.²²⁰ The collectivist aspect of the epic as a genre has received the critical attention of two of the most influential critics of the twentieth century - Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin - who were not only contemporaries of each other but also of Milman Parry who was then conducting his pioneering research on the oral epic with nonliterate South Slavic bards in Yugoslavia, but seemingly unaware of their overlapping theoretical pursuits. While Bakhtin was critical of what he perceived as the monologic authority and canonical status of the epic and categorized it as antiquated and outmoded, Benjamin's observations on the epic, recorded interestingly in his eponymously named essay on storytelling, "The Storyteller" are

²²⁰ Beissinger, Tylus and Wofford, 1999, 9.

more attuned to my line of argument.²²¹ Benjamin imagines the epic to be constituted by and constitutive of collectivity, reflecting a “popular” spirit and “thereby ever-changing, insofar as it is told by a storyteller whose manner of presenting tales is oral and alive.”²²² Although the immediacy of epic performance and oral storytelling evoked a sense of organic community for Benjamin, as Beissinger et al conclude, it was in the end a nostalgic yearning for an unattainable collectivity that could only be consolidated by the aurtic work of art in a pre-technological era. A similar lament for the lost “organic wholeness of illiterate communities,” although not without its share of problems, was also articulated by Georg Lukacs in his *Theory of the Novel*.²²³ In other words, what I have been trying to suggest so far is that staging the oral epic and its poetics of community in Pentecost can be understood as an attempt to pluralize the texts’ imagination of collectivity in a post-communist situation; even when construed as projecting an utopia it is a projection that does not base itself solely on a foreknowledge of the playwright’s personal politics but rather on a topos derived from that of the epic. Such staging can also offer us a glimpse of how newer, ‘post-European’ collective subjectivities, might be figured in literary and cultural texts.

This brings us back to the figure of the traveling Arab artist posited by Oliver as the creator of the fresco on the church wall, predating Giotto and his artistic technique by a hundred and fifty years and poised to redraw the history of Western art. Here, I

²²¹ Beissinger, Tylus and Wofford, 1999, 4-5, and Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings eds. *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3: 1935-1938* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

²²² Beissinger, Tylus and Wofford, 1999, 5

²²³ See Georg Lukacs, *Theory of the novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974).

will briefly indicate the implications of including such 'extra-European' conjectures – specifically the question of Islam vis-à-vis Europe – in the text of a play that has otherwise, and sometimes rightly, been criticized for advocating a closet-Eurocentrism. I will then proceed to close with a detailed discussion of Pentecost insofar as it can be read as a play and a plea for 'Europe.' At the end of Oliver's disquisition on the origin of the painting, when it has been decisively established that this invaluable work of art might enable the refugees to bargain a safe passage, Yasmin, the young Palestinian woman quickly moves towards the painting while carrying on the following exchange with Gabriella:

YASMIN. So, then. We need not kill Professor Katz to show that we mean business.

...We need only destroy this painting.

YASMIN pushes past GABRIELLA and climbs up the ladder.

GABRIELLA. No.

YASMIN (calling behind her, in Arabic). Haat al-banzeen. [Bring the petrol.]

Turning to see no-one move:

That is, if anybody wishes to get out of here.

ABDUL, shrugging, picks up the second petrol can.

OLIVER. Now surely, you can't think of --

YASMIN. Try me.

GABRIELLA. But don't you see – it is your painting. [emphasis added]

This gesture, of inclusion but more importantly recognition, offered by Gabriella, who had earlier expressed profound ambivalence towards the erstwhile Ottoman Turkish rulers of her country, of course builds upon the much more significant event that has just been revealed: the fact that an Arab painter traveling West, and not one of the great Italian masters, was possibly the pioneer of some of the most significant and influential formal developments that have since taken place in Western art. Edgar stages a striking denouement of the mystery of the painting that also confronts the complicated relationship with and attitude towards Islam, increasingly the most prominent religious and cultural other in the region in particular and for Europe in general. The mystery, as outlined above, not only turns upon a quirk of translation – caused by the fact that words for ‘to’ and ‘from’ in Old Nagolitic are interchangeable implying an artist coming from rather than going to Persia – but also on the different interpretation of mourning in Islam (in contrast to Christianity) that had been shared by Amira, one of the refugees. The dissonance in the posture of St. John between ‘our’ fresco and the one painted by Giotto is therefore attributed to the different depictions of despair at the death of a loved one; while the figure of St. John reaches out to comfort a grieving mother in the Christian depiction, it becomes a gesture of admonition for an evident want of faith in the ways of God in the Islamic rendering. By staging an argument about a probable Arab pioneer of modern European art *Pentecost*, therefore, attempts to posit a diversified antiquity of European modernity, and populates the pre-modern world with shifting, itinerant collectivities of people that have become difficult to imagine within contemporary geopolitics.

The other significant reference to Islam, also extending the argument I just outlined, occurs literally in the margins of the text – in the diegetic space between the two Acts in the printed text. It is an extract from Nobel Laureate Serbian author Ivo Andric's famous novel *The Bridge on the Drina* written during World War II. Here is the extract, as "quoted in the Independent on Sunday, 19 June, 1994," a novel quoted in a newspaper quoted in the margins of a play:

In Ivo Andric's novel, *The Bridge over the Drina*, a nineteenth-century Muslim shopkeeper tries to explain God's creation of Bosnia. "When Allah the Merciful and Compassionate created this world', he says, 'the earth was smooth and even as a finely engraved plate. That displeased the devil who envied man this gift of God. And while the earth was still just it had come from God's hands, damp and soft as unbaked clay, he stole up and scratched the face of God's earth with his nails as much and as deeply as he could. Therefore deep rivers and ravines were formed which divided one district from another and kept men apart. And Allah felt pity when he saw what the Accursed One had done, so he sent his angels to spread their wings above those places and men learnt from the angels of God how to build bridges, and therefore the greatest blessing is to build a bridge and the greatest sin to interfere with it..."

This story of creation in Islamic cosmogony with its metaphors of building bridges across divisions would appear to simply corroborate Edgar's Babelian discourse of translation foregrounded in the play. However, as a counter-discourse of the creation

legend arising from the periphery of 'Europe' it is also the only moment when the text comes close to displacing/supplementing the dominant Judeo-Christian cultural narrative that seems to imagine a model of translation inevitably emanating from the story of Babel. Gesturing towards an old inheritance of cultural syncretism in 'New Europe' tied to the intersections between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, *Pentecost* perhaps also imagines the future configurations of newer European collectivities. Such a reading might also help to move the text beyond a knee-jerk liberal critical charge of unexamined Eurocentricism.

Europe, as critics have pointed out, is in many ways the ostensible subject and object of *Pentecost*. And readings of the play, focusing more on its 'content' than any formal considerations, have oscillated between two broad positions: either a straightforward criticism of the play's Eurocentric assumptions stemming from its universalizing gestures and insufficient critique of the Enlightenment tradition, or, a critique of what is perceived to be its inadequate imagination of a 'New Europe' as either (socialist) utopian or "a fully hybridized arena of cultural encounter." In contrast, my reading claims that the dynamic of Europe – old and new – dramatized in *Pentecost* can be understood first and foremost as a formal articulation where 'the Balkans' as a discursive construction is staged as a translation of the figure of '(Western) Europe,' always imperfect, often reviled, but one that ends up revealing the status of the original itself as a construct and a spectral presence. It is also a pervasive and abiding example of what I have been trying to establish as a dramatic technique figured in translation. On a related but different note, 'the Balkans' have recently been theorized as an allegory

of Europe itself, most prominently by Etienne Balibar; here is an example of Balibar, a residual Eurocentrism notwithstanding, speaking about 'the Balkans' as part of his typology of political spaces that he feels Europe needs to configure in order to exist as 'politically constituted':

There is no 'center', only 'peripheries'; Or, better said, each region of Europe is or could be considered a "center" in its own right, because it is made of overlapping peripheries, each of them open (through "invasions", "conquests", "refuges", "colonizations" and "post-colonial migrations", etc.) to influences from all other parts of Europe, and from the whole world. This creates a potential for ethnic and religious conflicts, but also for hybridity and cultural invention. It is in this sense that, in previous essays, I suggested that, far from representing an exception and an anomaly, the Balkan patchwork (whose tragedy is largely Europe's responsibility, for want of a unified, firm and generous policy towards the various components of former socialist Yugoslavia) should be considered rather an epitome and an allegory of Europe as such.²²⁴ [emphasis added]

For my theorization of the Balkan/Europe binary in terms of translation that is not just a derivative act and a lesser presence but rather a process and a site that actively puts the status of the original and the authoritative into question, I draw upon the work of what is by now a long line of distinguished theorists primarily in the wake of Walter

²²⁴ Etienne Balibar, "Europe as Borderland" Alexander von Humboldt Lecture in Human Geography, University of Nijmegen, Nov 10, 2004, 13.

Benjamin's characterization of translation.²²⁵ The argument about reading the 'the Balkans' as a discursive construction – the presence of a 'balkanism,' similar to but not identical with Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism' – was first put forward by historian Maria Todorova in her influential book *Imagining the Balkans*, first published in 1997.²²⁶ Summarizing her intellectual and political motives, Todorova says:

I argued that a specific discourse, "balkanism," molds attitudes and actions toward the Balkans and could be treated as the most persistent form or "mental map" in which information about the Balkans is placed, most notably in journalistic, political, and literary output...I argued for the historicity of balkanism, which was shaped as a discourse in the early decades of the twentieth century, but whose genealogy can be traced to patterns of representation from the sixteenth century onward. I thus insisted on the historical grounding of balkanism in the Ottoman period, when the designation "Balkan" first entered the peninsula. Arguably, some aspects of the balkanist discourse grew out of the earlier schism between the churches of Rome and Constantinople, but the most salient aspects emerged from the Ottoman period.²²⁷

²²⁵ Most notably the work of Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, Naoki Sakai, Homi Bhabha, Rey Chow, Paul de Man, and Lawrence Venuti. I provide a more comprehensive account of their contribution to translation studies in the 'Introduction.'

²²⁶ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²²⁷ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans – Updated Edition* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Appearing two years before Todorova's book, *Pentecost* seems to pre-figure the 'Balkan question' in a manner in which the literary text can only imaginatively supplement what the historical text posits on the basis of its evidentiary reading. Not surprisingly, examples abound in the play – in the diegetic as well as the extra-diegetic spaces around the text – of this staging of the complex relationship between 'the Balkans' and Western Europe or 'Europe,' involving not only hybrid collectivity but historical de-Ottomanization, one that is full of tension and anxiety but also undercut by certain strains of longing and desire on the part of the former. In the rest of this chapter, I will quote a range of representative and provocative extracts from the play, perhaps generating a montage-like framework, in order to substantiate the main points I have been trying to argue. While most of the significant characters get to voice their positions vis-à-vis 'Europe' in some form or the other, Gabriella, the enthusiastic curator from 'our country's' National Museum clearly emerges as the playwright's favorite vehicle for expressing the anguished relationship between Eastern and Western Europe. Here is an extract from her angry repartee to Oliver towards the beginning of the play, when he appears to be diffident about the painting's status and non-committal with his help in its restoration:

Gabriella: Okeydoke. Alrighty. Leave it to our great National Museum.

After all, it is our painting. And we are responsible, grown-up democracy. And either it is hogwash and we are laughing stock or it right and we try to clean with hairdye and we are clumsy clods, destroying priceless work of art. You think we don't know what you say? East

Europe. Where even crooks don't know what icons worth. Where you pick up masterpiece for string of beads. Where everything is ugly and pathetic. Where they botch up socialism and make even bigger botch of market system too. So here? We have great genius painting which change history of art? What, here? In such a country make such botch of everything it touch? Well, I should bloody coco.²²⁸

The self/perception of 'the Balkans' in the context of contemporary Europe as a problem in the least and a site of abiding inferiority and threat at its worst has been repeatedly highlighted in the work of the most prominent thinkers of and from Europe – Etienne Balibar, Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas. With Derrida the reconfiguring of Europe has been a consistent theme, perhaps culminating in his explicit engagement with the topic in texts like *The Other Heading* (1992) or “Enlightenment past and to Come,” an address delivered in Paris on the 50th anniversary of *Le Monde diplomatique* in 2004.²²⁹ In May 2003, Habermas, in a now famous article co-signed by Derrida and published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* had appealed for the rebirth of a European public sphere.²³⁰ But for my purpose in this chapter, it is perhaps Balibar who has repeatedly and directly alluded to the status of 'the Balkans' as the 'constitutive outside' of Europe, a geopolitical articulation of what I

²²⁸ *Pentecost*, 10.

²²⁹ See <http://mondediplo.com/2004/11/06derrida>

²³⁰ For a reprint of the co-signed piece translated by Max Pensky, see *Constellations* Vol. 10 No. 3, 2003, 291-97.

have been trying to claim for the internally disruptive operation of translation.²³¹ Here is another excerpt from Balibar's recent reflections on the topic:

The fate of European identity as a whole is being played out in Yugoslavia and even more generally in the Balkans (even if this is not the only site of its trial). Either Europe will recognize in the Balkan situation not a monstrosity grafted to its breast, a pathological "aftereffect" of underdevelopment or of communism, but rather an image and effect of its own history and will undertake to confront it and resolve it and thus to put itself into question and transform itself. Only then will Europe probably begin to become possible again. Or else, it will refuse to come to face-to-face with itself and will continue to treat the problem as an exterior obstacle to be overcome through exterior means, including colonization.²³²

The desire of a new nation for accumulating cultural capital through the re-possession of valuable and historic art objects voiced by Gabriella, a representative of the national cultural elite of that country, is a recurrent theme in *Pentecost*. The following extract, coming at the end of Gabriella's passionate defense of the painting's antiquity and value in front of a magistrate and representatives of contending factions, is one of the most unambiguous declarations of this collective aspiration:

²³¹ Here I am drawing upon the sense of a "constitutive outside" as used by Ernesto Laclau in "Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject," *differences* 7:1 (1995), p151.

²³² Etienne Balibar, "At the Borders of Europe," in *We, the people of Europe?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 6.

GABRIELLA. ...Except we think that it is not this look like Giotto but that Giotto look like this. And if we are right, then it ...starting shot of great race to change Europe out from state of childish medieval superstition into modern rational universal man.

Slight pause.

And you know such progress can seem less big deal, if you go through your renaissance and enlightenment, if you have your Michelangelo and Mozart and Voltaire. Maybe if you reach to journey's end then it bit more easy to say, actually, this being grown up maybe not so hunky-dory after all. But, for us, it may be bit different. For us, being child not so far back. For those stand on Europe's battlements since all of last 600 years.

Pause

And yes it probably was painted here by foreigner. But maybe too you understand what it is meaning to us if despite all Turkish occupation, despite Mongol yoke, still this painting made, and wanted, asked for, and appreciated here. May be then we may feel bit more universal, bit more grown up, maybe even bit more European. (pg 42)

The desire for Europe, staged in the extract above, is of course only one step away from a suspicion that Europe has consistently denied that desired recognition and has withheld the reciprocity.

There are, of course, Euro-centric limitations of *Pentecost* – they are either obvious or has been made evident – but my interpretive effort in this chapter has not

been to accuse or excuse the text. Instead, I have attempted to locate openings for possible readings of emancipatory politics while underlining the limits of the existing ethical-political world of the text. I have proceeded by reading the dramatic technique of the play as figured in translation, which has then allowed me to reopen the question of collectivity formation on different grounds, grounds other than 'utopia' or 'Europe' or even Babel. The notion of incomprehensibility, where the act of communication that has always been the burden of translation fails, where hints and gestures come into play to supplement the lexical, serves as one such productive ground. *Pentecost*, I hope, has been shown to be aware of the complex contingencies of translation in ways that necessitate a consideration of the politics and poetics of its form and dramatic structure. The retelling of the ancient Indian epic poem *Ramayana* in the storytelling scene, suffused with a poetics of collectivity among other things, provides one such significant opportunity.

Halfway into *The Other Heading*, his meditation on the contemporary 'crisis' of Europe, Derrida makes an intriguing reference to the epic. His usage, the translator's footnote tells us, is "a play on un geste, a gesture and une geste, a collection of epic poems...as in the chanson de geste."²³³ Derrida begins by laying out the responsibility that devolves on 'us' of responding to the task of 'Europe' in the present, whereby:

it is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, but of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing

²³³ Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading* trans. Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 30.

itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading or the heading of the other, indeed – and this is perhaps something else altogether – towards the other of the heading, which would be the beyond of this modern tradition, another border structure, another shore.²³⁴

And then, exploring the possibilities of an adequate form which such a response might assume, he hypothesizes: “will this have to consist in repeating or in breaking with, in continuing or in opposing? Or indeed in attempting to invent another gesture, an epic gesture in truth that presupposes memory precisely in order to assign identity from alterity, from the other heading and the other of the heading, from a completely other shore?”²³⁵ It seems we are once again caught up within the epic and the gestural when trying to address the theatre of Europe; I find the resonance with my argument here particularly appealing since *Pentecost*, as I have been trying to outline, also attempts a convocation of the epic with its poetics of collectivity and translation with the politics of its inadequacies in its attempt to stage the question of Europe from another border. And this time, as Derrida emphasizes, it is “a Europe whose borders are not given – no more than its name, Europe being here only a paleonymic appellation.”²³⁶ In so far as *Pentecost* is intended towards an-other Europe, a ‘New Europe to-come,’ it perhaps then

²³⁴ Derrida, 1992, 29.

²³⁵ Derrida, 1992, 30.

²³⁶ Derrida, 1992, 30-31.

takes its rightful place between the playwright and the philosopher, as theatre next to theory.

V. Staging Blasphemy and Conversion: Figures of translation in Wole Soyinka's *The Road*

Studies of Wole Soyinka's dramatic technique have often focused on the omnipresent ritualistic trope of transition, whose significance for his craft has been most prominently emphasized by the author himself in his prolific commentaries.²³⁷ The most concise articulation of this schema is arguably the essay "The Fourth Stage: Through the mysteries of Ogun to the origin of Yoruba Tragedy," first published in 1968, and later anthologized in his two major collections of non-fiction prose.²³⁸ Soyinka has, on occasion, expressed public disapproval of adaptations and performances of his work, and perhaps that is one reason why his critics, beginning with the Nigerian scholar Oyin Ogunba's influential early work in 1975, have also been largely accepting

²³⁷ See for instance, Stephan Larsen, *A writer and his gods: a study of the importance of Yoruba myths and religious ideas to the writing of Wole Soyinka* (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, Department of the History of Literature, 1983), Ketu Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1986), Derek Wright, *Wole Soyinka Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993) and Mary David, *Wole Soyinka: A Quest for Renewal* (Madras, India: B.I. Publications, 1995).

²³⁸ "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the origin of Yoruba Tragedy" was first published in 1968, in *The Morality of Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 119-34, a festschrift for G. Wilson Knight, Soyinka's professor at the University of Leeds. It was reprinted later in his two essay collections *Myth Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976) and *Art Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988).

of the playwright's staging of the figure of transition in his plays.²³⁹ *The Road* (1965), a play about the profoundly disorienting effects of the arrival of modernity in the shape of commercial motor vehicles on the lives of the urban working poor who earned their living from driving and other related professions associated with the roads and highways of Nigeria, appeared at a time when Soyinka had already secured his reputation as the pre-eminent African playwright in English. The play subsequently assumed an important role in consolidating the position of the master trope of transition for Soyinka's dramaturgy by specifically emphasizing "the movement of transition" in the play's "Producer's note," and thereby directing subsequent critical attention to the ritual dance of the masked Yoruba ancestral spirits or *egungun* in the play as the embodiment of that transition. By the beginning of the nineteen nineties scholarship on Soyinka, overwhelmingly focused on the significance of myth and ritual in his craft, seemed to have exhausted its vital energies and reached a point where it was difficult to say anything new anymore about the playwright's technique or theatrical universe. This continuing fascination, or even fetishization, of ritual in the reception of playwrights and their work might be symptomatic of a larger problem that affects the entire field of drama and theatre studies – one thinks of Antonin Artaud as another prominent example of such ritualistic reading – and I hope to take it up in greater detail elsewhere. As far as studies of Soyinka are concerned, the last few years have seen a welcome critical attention that attempts to re-situate Soyinka's plays away

²³⁹ Oyin Ogunba, *The Movement of Transition: A Study of the play of Wole Soyinka* (Nigeria: Ibadan UP, 1975).

from a singular focus on ritualistic transition towards exciting new readings.²⁴⁰ I hope to place my study of Soyinka's dramatic technique as a theatrical analog of the act of translation within that tradition.

Until recently, Ato Quayson's *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing* published in 1997 was thought of as the last important theoretically sophisticated work on Soyinka. Biodun Jeyifo's *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism*, appearing almost after a decade of what seemed like near-unanimous critical silence on the playwright, now appears to mark another important step towards generating new readings of the playwright. Although Jeyifo's revisionist study masterfully examines the relationship between Soyinka's literary writings and political activism, it still gets caught in the trappings of a certain variety of biographical criticism, which, apart from the "ritual complex" has emerged as the other hobbyhorse in Soyinka scholarship. Here Olakunle George's recent work, although restricted to Soyinka's prose writings, is another interesting departure as it brings back the question of missionary efforts during (and after) colonial rule and consequent conversions to Christianity center stage in the discussion of modern Nigerian literature. These events constitute a significant development given that missionary activity and religious conversion in Western Africa, unlike in some of the other British ex-colonies like South Asia, has had a singularly

²⁴⁰ See, for instance, Ato Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and History in Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), Biodun Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), and Olakunle George, "Missionary Moments: Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka," (Conference presentation, University of Pittsburg, 2006). Catherine Cole, while replacing one patron divinity by another in Soyinka's private pantheon and therefore still remaining exclusively within the terms of his discourse, nevertheless has recently argued for another new reading in "Wole Soyinka's View of Citizenship in Structurally Adjusted Lagos: *The Beatification of Area Boy*." (Conference presentation, Columbia University, May 6, 2011).

influential role in shaping the postcolonial nation by affecting the religious make up of the country more inclusively.²⁴¹ In the backdrop of these developments, I am proposing a different reading of Soyinka's dramatic practice. I look at "The Fourth Stage" essay and *The Road*, significant as they already are within the author's *oeuvre*, but focus on two movements in the play that have not been sufficiently explored by either the playwright or his critics. These two acts are blasphemy and conversion. To the extent that these acts involve the re-articulation of a given text in a different context that both constitutes and is constituted by the newer text, blasphemy and conversion can be thought of as figures of literary translation. The staging of translation in this fashion in *The Road* have at least two significant consequences: first, it enacts a shift in focus from (ritualistic) transition to translation as a more productive figure of Soyinka's dramatic technique, and second, it seeks to re-position the play as a meditation on the status of belief at a time of decolonization and the advent of modernity (Nigeria gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960), thus troubling accepted notions of the secular of which the playwright himself is a strong adherent. As a consequence, insights from a reading of the play, I hope, will become more critically generalizable, beyond Soyinka's private theatrical universe and across contemporary and postcolonial drama while also intervening in ongoing critical conversations about the role and representation of religion and belief in the public sphere.²⁴² My reading of blasphemy and conversion as

²⁴¹ For an account of colonial Christianity's proselytizing efforts in the name not of religion as in West Africa but something like a "critical secularism" in British India see Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1989).

²⁴² For a representative selection of influential recent works that examine the contingent foundations of the secular with differing implications about its continued relevance as an epistemic category as well as an institutionalized

acts figured in translation shares in the arguments advanced by Homi Bhabha, Gauri Viswanathan and Vicente Rafael in their writings on the topic.²⁴³ The figure of translation is also mobilized in at least two other, probably more recognizable, situations staged in the play which I briefly discuss as part of my main argument: the acts of professional forgery carried out by Professor, the protagonist, on the side churning out perfect hand-made copies of fake driver's licenses and insurance policies for the regular visitors to his store, and the protocols that inevitably ensure the readability of a multilingual text like *The Road* with its striking use of Nigerian pidgin English complemented by a glossary at the end.

While the figure of translation remains insufficiently explored, scholarly discussion on Soyinka's dramatic practice has indeed proposed a similar trope in 'transition.' A transition is also, after all, a movement from one structure to another although not as fully transformative as a translation. Ogunba, as I have stated above, had already used the expression "the movement of transition" for his eponymously titled study of Soyinka's plays, and to him it was nothing but a metaphysical search "for the meaning of life [in Soyinka's work] in the now familiar manner of twentieth century

doctrine see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), and essays by Charles Taylor ("Modes of Secularism," 1998), Jürgen Habermas, ("Faith and Knowledge," 2001 and "Religion in the Public Sphere," 2006), and Gil Anidjar ("Secularism," 2006).

²⁴³ See Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Ithaca & London: Cornell UP, 1988), Homi Bhabha, "How newness enters the world: Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation," in *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), and Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998).

existentialists."²⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, he also suggested that *The Road* could be understood as a non-European example of the 'Theatre of the Absurd,' a rather uncomplicated assessment that was to recur in future readings of the text.²⁴⁵ This description, Ogunba further suggests, also suitably characterizes the disposition of the character of Professor in *The Road* and his unending quest for what is enigmatically referred in the play as "the Word," and the play becomes, "Soyinka's literary (dramatic) interpretation of the modern African experience from the early days of Christian fanaticism to the great turbulence of the 1960s, with its political violence. Its road deaths and its *juju*."²⁴⁶ However, closer attention to this influential even if slightly dated early critique reveals that the phrase "movement of transition" was extrapolated by Ogunba from Soyinka's own specific usage in a brief note meant "For the Producer" that appears, as I have already mentioned, at the beginning of the play under discussion - *The Road*. It then becomes possible to argue that this is an example of a critique's failure to sufficiently challenge the author's preferred terms for reading his work, without necessarily diminishing the interpretive significance of those terms *per se*. The figure of transition, for instance, is central to Soyinka's own conception of his dramatic practice as evident from the note where he had originally used the expression to describe the

²⁴⁴ Ogunba, 125.

²⁴⁵ The 'Theatre of the Absurd,' inspired by the post-World War II existentialist philosophies of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre in Europe, was an important theatrical movement that attempted to stage the precariousness of human existence and its fundamental meaninglessness through dramatic works. Some of the prominent practitioners of this theatre were Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter. Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961) still remains the authoritative account of the movement.

²⁴⁶ Ogunba, 125.

function of the ritual dance of the *egungun* – the masked ancestral spirit of the Yoruba – towards the end of the play:

The dance is the movement of transition; it is used in the play as a visual suspension of death – in much the same way as Murano, the mute, is a dramatic embodiment of this suspension. He functions as an arrest of time, or death, since it was in his ‘agemo’ phase that the lorry knocked him down. Agemo, the mere phase, includes the passage of transition from the human to the divine essence (as in the festival of Ogun in this play), as much as the part psychic, part intellectual grope of Professor towards the essence of death.²⁴⁷

On a cursory reading, “the movement of transition” mentioned in the above extract seems like a tautological expression given that transition is commonly understood as movement albeit movement of a specific kind that involves a change of state or perhaps, position. In the context of Soyinka’s discussion of transition as a unique stage within the Yoruba mythology of creation, however, the apparent tautology gives way to something with more dramatic potential. But before we move on to a detailed discussion of Soyinka’s dramatic theory, I want to briefly talk about the significance of the slice of dramatic action condensed in the note: While the play dramatizes the goings on in a driver’s shack and repair store run by Professor (“Aksident Store”), an ex-lay reader at the nearby church, and frequented by a range of drivers, touts, petty criminals and even a corrupt policeman, Murano, the mute, is the errand boy for Professor who

²⁴⁷ Soyinka, 149.

took him under his wings after he was found in a state of profound shock following a road accident during a masked *egungun* parade. The lorry in the above note was being driven by Kotunu, one of the drivers who quit the profession soon after, deeply troubled by the recurrent death and destruction wrought on the poorly maintained roads. His mate and passenger tout was Samson who shares a lingering and fearful distrust of Professors' motivations. Murano, the boy, was dancing in a ritual mask (in this case of Ogun, the god of the road, among many things) inhabiting what traditional Yoruba belief would call the 'agemo' stage of transition from human to divine essence as part of the driver's festival procession when the lorry knocked him down; presumed to be dead, Murano was thought to have "transubstantiated into an ancestral spirit or deity." Professor, subsequently, recovered his traumatized body and presumably sensing the presence of profound and terrifying truths beneath his mute exterior, made him an accomplice in his increasingly delusional yet obsessive quest for 'the Word.' I will have more to say about these events later in the chapter in so far as they function as a context for staging Professor's blasphemy as well as the question of belief in the play.

Ogunba's adoption of Soyinka's proposed framework, an instance of a critic deriving the terms of his discourse from the author's commentary on her own work, is more a norm than an exception, and extends to all literary criticism at large. Critiques of Wole Soyinka's works, I would suggest, also have to contend with a unique aspect of his status among well-known contemporary playwrights in English: his indirect and even unintended ability to influence and condition the critical reception of his own dramatic works. This influence has been primarily effected through a striking corpus of

theoretical commentary and reflection on drama and theatre (and the literary arts in general) that Soyinka has steadily produced along with the writing of plays, and which most critics have felt obligated to mine for their interpretations of his work. It has resulted in a situation where, prompted by the author's insistence on the primacy of an improvised Yoruba ritual performativity in his craft, "scholarly discussion of Soyinka's dramatic corpus is overwhelmingly dominated by a sort of neoclassicism which sees ritual – and idioms closely linked to it – as a sort of regulative dramaturgical paradigm in the playwright's major dramas."²⁴⁸ When interpreted as a deferral to authorial intention in the scholarship on Soyinka, this is also a curious countermove to dominant literary theoretical tendencies marked most recently by the glorious afterlife of Roland Barthes' 1967 essay that famously declared "the death of the author" – and the discussion of "intentional fallacy" in American New Criticism before Barthes, not to mention the tradition of Marxist ideology critique – that introduced a lingering suspicion between an author's stated intention and its actualization in her text.²⁴⁹ It is definitely interesting to explore how literary texts often anticipate the critical labor of reading by offering immanent clues for their interpretation; however, it is another thing if, based on the assumption that the frameworks which have (or have not) served the author well in creating the literary work will also be necessarily the most suitable for interpreting it, the author tends to prescribe protocols of reading. However, since every

²⁴⁸ Jeyifo, 123.

²⁴⁹ See William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), and Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Margaret Harkness," in Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne eds. *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1996).

text wants to be read and reading becomes a transactional act between the author and the reader, perhaps these immanent protocols invite us to read the text as a metonym of the author's desire rather than as a statement of intention? After all, to realize the desire inscribed in the text is not to take the text as its fulfillment. In any case, Soyinka's polemical stance on what one critic calls the "religious esoterics" of his dramatic theory and practice seem to have worked itself out in a similar fashion. As I have already mentioned, recent works by Quayson, Jeyifo and George have attempted to open up Soyinka's texts to new readings that try to go beyond the paradigm of ritualistic determinism and have been particularly helpful in shaping my approach. However, even an otherwise astute study like Jeyifo's that rightly argues that, "though it looms large in his armory of dramaturgic models, ritual is only one among a wide variety of performance modes appropriated by the playwright in his most ambitious plays," also falls into the trap of reducing literary criticism of Soyinka's work to an endorsement or negation of his powerful public intellectual persona.²⁵⁰ A case in point being the slightly untenable proposition that an interpretation of the recurring figures of the "Big Man" surrounded by a band of followers in his plays (e.g. Professor in *The Road*) can be deciphered from a knowledge of the symbolic meaning and supposed sense of entitlement that resides in the real life patronymic 'Soyinka' ("oso yi mi ka" in its

²⁵⁰ Jeyifo, 123.

expanded Yoruba original) – “I am surrounded by sorcerers” – acquired at some point by one of the author’s ancestors and apparently reflected in his literary creations.²⁵¹

The repeated recourse to Soyinka’s theoretical and expository texts, particularly by his non-Nigerian readers, however, can be explained, on the one hand, as attempts to come to terms with the apparent remoteness and consequent inscrutability of Yoruba mythology that the author mobilizes in his works; a case of possible intellectual ethnocentrism even, where literary texts of the ethnic other fail to count as literary texts *per se* and often call out for an anthropological foreknowledge for their successful comprehension. On the other hand, the author’s penchant for producing theoretical essays which critically even if idiosyncratically assimilate elements from sources as diverse as Nietzschean interpretations of classical Greek tragedy and traditional Yoruba ritual performance can be understood on the lines of a modernist will to manifesto, a necessary impulse to situate his eclectic and avant guardist dramatic practice. My broad contention in this chapter is that Soyinka’s pronouncements on his own theatre practice, while undoubtedly compelling and insightful, have probably come to exercise a disproportionate and perhaps restrictive influence on critical interpretations of some of his most ambitious dramatic texts. Specifically, I suggest that the limitations of these author-ized frameworks become particularly evident when retrospectively extended to the interpretation of some of Soyinka’s most complex plays like *The Road* (1965), written before he had even articulated a full-fledged theory of his dramatic practice.²⁵² Instead,

²⁵¹ Jeyifo, 13.

²⁵² “The Fourth Stage,” as I have already noted, was first published only in 1968, three years after *The Road*.

my reading of Soyinka's dramaturgy attempts to recontextualize and even go beyond a narrowly defined Yoruba ritualistic determinism in order to generate insights that might also be critically generalizable across postcolonial and contemporary drama. Rethinking Soyinka's dramatic technique in *The Road* as a theatrical analogue of the act of translation, I argue, is a significant step in that direction.

I will elaborate on this reading later in the chapter but let us first briefly focus on an example of this second medium of influence exerted by Soyinka: his non-fiction essays. While the Producer's Note of *The Road* is one example of the author trying to shape the reading of his work, a more complex framework is articulated in "The Fourth Stage" a few years later. There he begins by stating how the journey to "the heart of the Yoruba Mysteries leads by its own ironic truths through the light of Nietzsche and the Phrygian deity" but quickly concedes that the fundamental difference between Hellenic and Yoruba traditional art is that the former is 'ideational' while the latter is 'essential.' Having set out the terms of distinction, he then develops an inspired and improvised account of Yoruba cosmology according to which:

"The past is the ancestors', the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unborn. The deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws, suffering the same agonies and uncertainties, employing the same masonic intelligence of

rituals for the perilous plunge into the fourth area of experience, the immeasurable gulf of *transition*.”²⁵³

Being an essential (as opposed to representational) form of art traditional Yoruba drama, however, conceptualizes the terrifying gulf of transition as no longer an external reality to be imitated in its ritual re-enactment but as already contained as “essence” within “the collective being” of the actors in Ogun mysteries, the communicant chorus.²⁵⁴ This perilous plunge in the metaphysical abyss, the “fourth area of experience,” is therefore always an enactment without mimesis of the myth of the original and willful transgression of Ogun, the *ur*-actor, the god of artistry, creativity and metal craft, and guardian of the road. According to traditional Yoruba mythology, out of the splintering of the primordial deity Orisa-nla whereby the entire Yoruba pantheon was born, also emerged two representative dramatic traditions: the drama of “suffering spirit” patronized by the syncretic god Obatala and rejected by Soyinka, and the challenging drama of Ogun’s disintegration and spiritual re-assemblage in the act of transitioning through the elemental abyss.²⁵⁵ The drama of Ogun, celebrated by Soyinka, is all about the suffering of dissociation and its tumultuous overcoming through an instantiation of the “combative will” – that, according to Soyinka, is the stuff of Yoruba traditional performance: “Ritual anguish is ...experienced as that primal transmission of the gods’ despair – vast, numinous, always incomprehensible.” And the harmonious

²⁵³ Soyinka, 1976, 148.

²⁵⁴ Soyinka, 1976, 142.

²⁵⁵ For a comprehensive account of Yoruba myth and religion see Ulli Beier ed. *Yoruba Myths* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

Yoruba metaphysics of “accommodation and resolution” could be born only after the passage of its gods through such redemptive and restorative action. The improvisations of the Yoruba tragic artist then becomes not simply the “representations of the ancestor, recognitions of the living or unborn, but of the no man’s land of transition between and around these temporal definitions of experience.” In other words, “The source of the possessed lyricist...is residual in the numinous area of *transition*. This is the fourth stage, the vortex of archetypes and home of the tragic spirit.”²⁵⁶ In Soyinka’s scheme of things, the passage of transition, more than the three planes of existence it passes through, emerges to be the more productive plane of dramatization.

In support of my reading of translation as the animating figure of Soyinka’s dramatic technique I would, in fact, suggest that *The Road* written a few years before “The Fourth Stage” can be thought of as a prequel, in the mode of dramatic fiction, to some of the theoretical propositions offered later in his literary non-fiction texts. What is staged in the play are fragments of an overarching theory of dramatic composition that are yet to coalesce into a coherent whole, rendering the text more experimental in its dramatic form and technique such that transition as the dominant figure of Soyinka’s dramaturgy is not yet firmly in place. Among contemporary critics Jeyifo also remarks on the experimental format of *The Road* describing it as “a dramaturgical method which foregrounds language and other means of expression as artistic means of production and representation whose yield in terms of aesthetic, political or ethical impact cannot

²⁵⁶ Soyinka, 149.

be taken for granted."²⁵⁷ By the time we reach the "Fourth Stage" essay a few years later, however, Soyinka's exegetical energies appear to be solely concentrated on the 'passage of transition' as the preeminent figure for his dramatic practice that perhaps reached its most visible and controversial articulation in *Death and the King's Horseman* in 1975.²⁵⁸ Great work was still to come but during this particular stage of his career, and here I am stepping a little ahead of the discussion in this chapter, Soyinka's earlier articulation of a dramatic practice richly figured in transition as well as translation had lost much of its original nuance, assumed a rather polemical and problematic identitarian stance echoing some of the political positions like 'negritude' that he had initially criticized, and ended up attracting a lot of unfavorable critical attention.

So far, I have been trying to outline how between his notable dramatic fiction and the most polemical examples of his literary non-fiction Wole Soyinka has exercised a shaping influence on the reading and interpretation of his literary works. I have also explored the possibility of reading *The Road*, and "The Fourth Stage" together to indicate a formative stage of his dramatic and aesthetic theories. Soyinka's first novel *The Interpreters*, published in the same year as *The Road*, can be read as the third component of what is really a compelling multi-genre effort to arrive at a coherent aesthetic theory, but a fuller discussion of that unfortunately lies beyond the scope of

²⁵⁷ Jeyifo, 142.

²⁵⁸ Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (London: Methuen, 1975).

this chapter.²⁵⁹ I shall instead proceed to my reading of conversion and blasphemy as figures of translation *vis-a-vis* the two texts with which we began.

Towards the beginning of the second act of *The Road* (1965) we witness the following interesting exchange between 'Professor,' the riveting central character who is the "proprietor etc. of the driver's haven. Formerly Sunday-school teacher and lay-reader," and Samson, a driver's mate and presently out of work passenger tout who frequents that 'driver's haven,' which also serves as the sole setting for the play:

Samson: May I ask you something? A little personal?

Prof.: Why not? Even God submits himself to a weekly interrogation?

Samson: Thank you sir. Now it is only a matter of interest.

You mustn't be offended sir, because I really want to know...

Prof.: In short, you want to know whether people are right when they say

I am mad.

Samson: No sir, certainly not. What I wanted to know is...well you used to read the lesson in English in that church and we all used to enjoy your performance...But what has puzzled me is this...I mean did you have a source of private income. What I mean is Professor, what really happened about the er...you know...this matter of church funds?

Prof.: Sin and wages and sin - [Stops. Turns and faces the church.] If you could see through that sealed church window you will see the lectern bearing the

²⁵⁹ Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (London: Deutsch, 1965).

Word on bronze. I stood often behind the bronze wings of the eagle;
 on the broad span of the eagle's outstretched wings rested the Word
 - oh what a blasphemy it all was but I did not know it. Oh yes, I stood
 then on the other side of that window - then it was always open, not
 barred and bolted as it now is, from fear [Samson blinks hard, rubs
 his eyes.] - through that window my sight led straight on to this spot.
 In my youth, let me tell you, in my youth we went out and waged a
 holy war on every sore as this. We pulled down every drinking
 shack and set fire to it, drove out the poisoners of men's brains.²⁶⁰

.....

Oh the Word is a terrible fire and we burned them by the ear.

Only that was not the Word you see, oh no, it was not.²⁶¹

A number of interesting points are thrown up by this revealing exchange in the middle of the play but none more important than Professor's equivocal narration, which in a rare moment of precision, offers a gloss on the two acts central to my reading of Soyinka's dramatic technique in the play: religious conversion and blasphemy. While conversion to Christianity in colonial Nigeria shaped his zealous youth ("we went out and waged a holy war...Oh the Word is a terrible fire and we burned them by the ear"), blasphemy, committed later in

²⁶⁰ Wole Soyinka, *The Road in Collected Plays 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 205-6.

²⁶¹ Soyinka, 1973, 205-6.

life – perhaps prompted by the realization that “Only that was not the Word you see, oh no, it was not” – led to Professor’s expulsion from the local church.

A further cue for my reading comes from two footnotes in the essay “The Fourth Stage,” which I have already discussed as Wole Soyinka’s most famous statement of his dramatic practice. Troubling essentialisms like “the Yoruba mind” notwithstanding, these footnotes, necessarily in the margins of the text, seem to anticipate the possibilities of its divergent readings. They have obviously not received much scholarly attention. The succinct formulation offered in these footnotes is as follows: the tragic experience in traditional Yoruba drama consists of “the essence of transition” rendered in the staging of a range of “psycho-historic” motifs.²⁶² However, in the present moment, and this is where the text contradicts as well as conflates its argumentative thrust and narrative logic in what we might call “a moment of transgression,” Soyinka then goes on to suggest, these motifs, paralleling “the mythology of primordial chaos, as well as the rites of transition (birth, death etc.)” can refer to powerful “group experiences” like “race origination, uprooting, wandering and settling,” or “the collective memory of dispersion and re-assemblage in racial coming-into-being.”²⁶³ This meta-commentary, buried in footnotes, not only inscribes the author’s desire for a contemporary relevance of mythic material but also immediately complicates the dual accusations levied by critics like Jeyifo against Soyinka of uncritically positing primarily imagined, metaphysical solidarities on the one hand and reviving supposedly esoteric and

²⁶² Footnote 5, Soyinka, 1976, 149.

²⁶³ Soyinka, 1976, 149.

marginalized autochthonous cultural practices that “survive precariously under the combined weight of repressive Christian proselytization, the rise of secular, rational world-views, and the material forces of technology and economic production,” on the other.²⁶⁴ Instead, what Soyinka attempts to do here, I suggest, can be understood as advancing not one but two significant theoretical gestures: first, he establishes the centrality of the figure of transition in thinking about acts of dispersion and assemblage with respect to his dramatic works, something I have been trying to complicate in this chapter so far and second, he expands the domain of the figure of transition beyond that of the strictly mythical and metaphysical – I am very tempted to say ‘secularizes’ it – to include historical processes of collectivity formation like exile or migration (“group experiences...[like]...race origination, uprooting, wandering and settling”). My reading of *The Road* takes these interesting insights as its point of departure for thinking about the acts of blasphemy and conversion, two similar processes of collective (sometimes traumatic) self fashioning staged in the play, but it enacts a further displacement: instead of the overdetermined concept of transition within Soyinka’s theatrical universe, I propose the figure of translation for understanding his dramatic technique. In the rest of the chapter I attempt to enumerate my reasons for such a reading but first let us follow the thread of translation a little longer to explore some of the possible conclusions it might engender.

Drama and theatre studies have largely thought of translation in terms of a transfer: either inter-lingual i.e. translating a play from one language to another, or,

²⁶⁴ Jeyifo, 124.

page-to-stage, transforming the dramatic text into a performance. This instrumental view of translation *between* texts has been corroborated by insufficient exploration of translation figured *within* texts, for instance, as dramatic technique or narrative strategy. As I show in my chapters on Utpal Dutt and David Edgar, a significant reason for the latter perhaps has to do with the marginalization of any discussion of multilingualism in studies of modern drama whose dominant assumptions still remain attached to monolingual play texts.²⁶⁵ In recent times, translation, in its figurative (as well as literal) dimension has emerged as a powerful heuristic in postcolonial creative and theoretical practice.²⁶⁶ However, it continues to be discussed most prominently, and predictably, with respect to adaptations and re-writings, which in the case of Soyinka have remain focused on his well-received renderings of Euripedes' *The Bacchae*, and *Opera Wonyosi* based on John Gay-Bertolt Brecht's *The Three Penny Opera*.²⁶⁷ A renewed attention to translation in contemporary literary and cultural studies in general and drama and theatre studies in particular is now attempting to go beyond such familiar yet restrictive conceptualizations as either inter-lingual or text-to-stage transfer. A few scholars have even started referring to these developments as a new 'translational turn' in the field that gesture towards thinking about translation as constitutive of literary form and

²⁶⁵ As recent studies like Erith Jaffe-Berg's *The Multilingual Art of Commedia dell'Arte* (Ottawa, Toronto, N.Y.: Legas, 2009) have shown, the early-modern *commedia* remains an exception and an important precursor in this regard.

²⁶⁶ See Tejaswani Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (University of California Press, 1992), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips eds. *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1992, Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Thick Translation," *Callaloo*, Volume 16 Number 4, (Autumn, 1993).

²⁶⁷ *The Bacchae of Euripedes: A communion rite* (New York: Norton, 1973); *Opera Wonyosi* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1981).

more interestingly for my purpose here, technique.²⁶⁸ My work on translation as dramatic technique and narrative strategy in *The Road* and the other plays in the dissertation, I submit, is an exploration in this direction.

Among contemporary cultural theorists Homi Bhabha has consistently engaged with the figures of transition and translation in his attempts to theorize postcolonial migration. Thinking about the 'borderline' figure of the migrant he calls the process a "massive historical displacement" and the migrant's liminal experience as "not only a 'transitional' reality but also a 'translational' phenomenon."²⁶⁹ Bhabha's theorization of postcolonial migration in terms of transition/translation, I argue, can not only help us illuminate Soyinka's intimations of group experiences of uprooting, wandering and settling as contemporary psycho-historical motifs of the original metaphysical-theological essence of transition recorded, as I have noted earlier, in the margins of his text, but also realign the playwright's aesthetic matrix around a shift in emphasis from transition to the figure of translation. According to Bhabha the new (migrant) subject of cultural difference "becomes a problem that Walter Benjamin has described as the irresolution, or liminality, of translation, the element of resistance in the process of transformation, "that element in a translation which does not lend itself to

²⁶⁸ See, for instance, Maya E. Roth and Sara Freeman eds. *International Dramaturgy: Translations & Transformations in the Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker* (Brussels: PIE-Peter Lang Press, 2008) and Roger Baines, Cristina Marinetti and Manuela Perteghella eds. *Staging and Performing Translation: Text and Theatre Practice* (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁶⁹ Bhabha, "How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation," in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 224.

translation.”²⁷⁰ In a telling use of the language of drama and theatre to analyze a non-dramatic text, Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* – a common even if rarely noted critical reading practice – Bhabha states that “The migrant culture of the ‘in-between,’ the minority position, *dramatizes* the activity of culture’s untranslatability;”²⁷¹ If such a move appears to contradict my stated aims to outline the staging of translation we only need to remind ourselves that such any notion of the dramatization of untranslatability is at the same time a staging of translation in as much as the latter, as a long line of translation theorists have variously argued, becomes an act caught within the double bind of ‘necessity/impossibility’ – the compelling need to translate without the guarantee of a “full transmissal of subject-matter.”²⁷² Bhabha goes on to conclude that the process of staging the untranslatability of cultures eventually moves “the question of culture’s appropriation” towards “an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture’s difference.”²⁷³ Much has been written on the concept of ambivalence and hybridity, and I do not want to advance an argument about the character of Professor in *The Road*, for instance, that simply re-positions Bhabha’s reading this time from the vantage point of the hybrid subject within the postcolony as opposed to the metropolitan location of the migrant in advanced capitalist countries; Although, even such an argument can still

²⁷⁰ Bhabha, 224.

²⁷¹ Bhabha, 225.

²⁷² Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 75.

²⁷³ Bhabha 224-25

contribute to a necessary corrective to Bhabha's exclusive and almost effusive attention to the class-fixed diasporic as the *ur*-subject of postcolonial disjuncture and difference. What emerges as more interesting for my reading of *The Road* is Bhabha's subsequent move towards characterizing blasphemy as "a transgressive act of cultural translation," a move I take up for discussion in the next section.²⁷⁴

In his reading of *The Satanic Verses* Bhabha claims, "to blaspheme is not simply to sully the ineffability of the sacred;" blasphemy "goes beyond the severance of tradition and replaces its claim to a purity of origins with a poetics of relocation and reinscription."²⁷⁵ Blasphemy, like translation, it appears, also becomes an intimate act of reading with often radical and unpredictable consequences. It is possible to argue that Soyinka's reimagining of the myth of Ogun (Dionysius, Apollo and Prometheus rolled into one) and his "re-creative intelligence" can yield its own interesting parallels to blasphemy conceived along these lines – the severance of cosmic harmony followed by violent restitution that eventually reconfigures the origin story – suggesting a reading of the author's dramatic practice itself as an act of blasphemy. However, since Professor in *The Road* is not Ogun, or not yet, even if some critics would have it otherwise, let us revisit the exchange between Professor and Samson with which I began in light of Bhabha's observations. Here is Professor again, offering a version of his blasphemous act in the cryptic, mystifying diction that Soyinka has given him, in response to Samson's questions about the 'real' reasons for his expulsion from the church:

²⁷⁴ Bhabha, 225

²⁷⁵ Bhabha, 225

Prof.: Sin and wages and sin – [Stops. Turns and faces the church.] If you could see through that sealed church window you will see *the lectern bearing the Word on bronze. I stood often behind the bronze wings of the eagle; on the broad span of the eagle's outstretched wings rested the Word – oh what a blasphemy it all was but I did not know it. Oh yes, I stood then on the other side of that window – then it was always open, not barred and bolted as it now is, from fear [Samson blinks hard, rubs his eyes.] – through that window my sight led straight on to this spot. In my youth, let me tell you, in my youth we went out and waged a holy war on every sore as this. We pulled down every drinking shack and set fire to it, drove out the poisoners of men's brains.*

Samson [spiritedly.]: And they didn't fight back? You try that here and see what happens to you.

Prof.: *Oh the Word is a terrible fire and we burned them by the ear. Only that was not the Word you see, oh no, it was not. And so for every dwelling that fell ten more rose in its place until they grew so bold that one grew here, setting its laughter against the very throat of the organ pipes. Every evening, until I thought, until one day I thought, I have never really known what lies beyond that window. And one night, the wall fell down, I heard the laughter of children and the wall fell down in an uproar of flesh and dust. And I left the Word hanging in the coloured*

light of sainted windows...[Almost humbly].²⁷⁶ (italics mine)

Let us try and trace in the above extract the possible blasphemous trajectories espoused by Professor. He recalls a time when he shared an aggressive commitment towards practicing and preaching his (newly adopted) Christian faith: “in my youth we went out and waged a holy war...Oh the Word is a terrible fire and we burned them by the ear;” And, Ogunba provides helpful historical gloss by way of commenting how, “The days Professor recalls were the 1930s in Nigeria,” which was the time “when Christianity first effectively penetrated certain parts of Nigeria and then branched into several sects. Some of these sects insisted on a literal interpretation of the Bible and waged a ‘holy’ war against heathenism.”²⁷⁷ This moment of aggressive evangelism can be better understood as an index of Professor’s act of conversion, about which I will have more to say later, but read as blasphemy it would mark the beginning of the disappearance of belief in the sanctity and spiritual adequacy of ‘the Word’ in his quest for ultimate knowledge. At this stage, ‘the Word’ is, of course, understood unambiguously as referring to the gospel and the divinity in Christianity whose repository was the pulpit: “If you could see through that sealed church window you will see the lectern bearing the Word on bronze. I stood often behind the bronze wings of the eagle; on the broad span of the eagle’s outstretched wings rested the Word.” However, when Professor exclaims at the end of this sentence “oh what a blasphemy it all was but I did not know it,” I suggest that the blasphemy he recounts ‘now’ has less to do with his deviation

²⁷⁶ Soyinka (1973), 206.

²⁷⁷ Ogunba, 129.

from Christianity than with the metaphysical delusion that led him in the first place to look for 'the Word' in the church: "Only that was not the Word you see, oh no, it was not." The crucial transformation here is not just the transgression of 'the Word' as it was initially received by the convert but the gradual revelation that 'the Word' now has a new referent, it has assumed a new meaning for the blasphemer; 'the Word' is no longer intelligible within the metaphysical context provided by the church, perhaps it never was, and the quest has to necessarily go beyond its literal and figural confines: "And I left the Word hanging in the coloured light of sainted windows...." This act which is "not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular...[but] a moment when the subject matter or the content of a cultural [religious] tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation," argues Bhabha, is what amounts to blasphemy.²⁷⁸ The "cultural tradition" in this case is, of course, that of Christian metaphysics, and the act of alienating translation in my reading of *The Road* constitutes the scene of conversion.²⁷⁹ One might even risk saying that conversion itself operates as a species of translation.

An interesting variation on this reading of blasphemy as a figure of translation is staged in the scene where Samson recounts the "actual" events of the Professor's fall out with the bishop to Salubi, another aspiring driver's mate and passenger tout at the shack:

Samson:...Professor enh, he get class. He get style. That suit he wears

²⁷⁸ Bhabha, 227.

²⁷⁹ Bhabha, 225.

now, that was the very way he used to dress to evening service. I tell you, the whole neighborhood used to come and watch him, they would gather in this very bar and watch him through the windows, him and his hundred handkerchiefs spread out on the pew in front of him...

Salubi: What about the day they said he fought with the bishop?

Samson: ...My friend, they did have a fight but it was a duel of gentlemen. Look, I'll tell you what happened. Just because the bishop thought he had B.A., B.D...

Salubi: How much?

Samson: B.D. Bachelor of Divinity stupid. But B.D. or no B.D. the man just couldn't knock oratory like the Professor. In fact everybody always said that Professor ought to preach the sermons but a joke is a joke, I mean, the man is not ordained. So, we had to be satisfied with him reading the lesson and I'm telling you, three-quarters of the congregation only came to hear his voice. And the bishop was jealous. When the bishop came on his monthly visit and preached the sermon after Professor's lesson, it was a knock-out pure and simple. Before bishop open in mout' half de church done go sleep. And the ones who stayed awake only watched Professor taking notes.²⁸⁰

This aspect of Professor's role in the church, his flamboyant disposition ("he get style") and spectacular oratorical performance as a lay reader ("the man [the Bishop] just

²⁸⁰ Soyinka (1973), 162-63.

couldn't knack oratory like the Professor") that generated a dedicated following among the congregation while at the same time antagonizing the presiding bishop whose sermons were increasingly relegated in theological importance already contained the seeds of blasphemy. Soyinka's opportune use of West African Pidgin English in the above exchange between two barely literate members of the urban working poor, Salubi and Samson, ("Before bishop open in mout' half de church done go sleep") that deals with the difference between an accomplished speaker of English (Professor) and a less engaging one (the Bishop) not only underscores the contrarian future trajectory of Professor but also constructs a rich, multilingual text of theatre that can become another occasion for the invocation of translation as literary technique. Here, however, is Ogunba once again, with his helpful exposition of how such an event might have been historically perceived. "Professor," he contends, and I quote at length:

was talented... especially with oratory, and soon proved outstanding in his role to the extent that he became a potent force in the community. But soon, emphasis was concentrated on the *mere outward observances of Christian practice* – what is sometimes vulgarly described as 'Churchianity' rather than Christianity. He forgot the tenets of his religion, used his great powers for his own benefit and perfected his *false piety* and garrulity."

What Ogunba describes as "mere outward observances of Christian practice" and "false piety" is corroborated by Samson in his portrayal of how "three-quarters of the congregation only came to hear [Professor's] "voice" so that by the time the bishop started preaching the actual sermon "half de church done go sleep." This separation

(and eventual collapse) between the outward form of the sermon (Professor's voice) and its purported content (the scriptural text) presented here can be read as a dichotomy of the profane and the sacred, foreshadowing a notion of blasphemy as the profanation of the sacred. Preaching a sermon is arguably an act of translation, in so far as it represents a text within a context different from its original situation, and the act takes on additional significance when carried out in a colonized setting twice removed by a difference in language. Following Bhabha it might then be possible to claim that a disjuncture between form and content in the act of sermonizing-as-translation mentioned above comes to represent an act of blasphemy. Bhabha draws upon Benjamin's reading of translation in his well-known essay "The Task of the Translator," (1923) a work that has assumed the status of an *ur*-text for much twentieth century translation theory.²⁸¹ Benjamin's use of "the concept of 'foreignness'," Bhabha argues, brings him closest to describing "the performativity of translation as the staging of cultural difference," leading up to the famous analogy, "...unlike the original where fruit and skin form a certain unity, *in the act of translation the content or subject matter is made disjunct, overwhelmed and alienated by the form of signification, like a royal robe with ample folds.*"²⁸² (italics in original).

In his elucidation of blasphemy as an act figured in translation Bhabha, as I have already noted, consistently employs theatrical metaphors that become particularly salient when reading a play. A case in point is the following claim that, "Rushdie

²⁸¹ Benjamin, "The Task of The Translator."

²⁸² Bhabha, 227.

repeatedly uses the word 'blasphemy' in the migrant sections of the book to indicate *a theatrical form* of the staging of cross-genre and cross-cultural identities."²⁸³ Extending this reading of blasphemy as a theatrical form, I argue that the most prominent "cross-genre and cross-cultural" identity staged in *The Road* is the figure of the convert. And, this brings us to the second part of my reading of the play in this chapter: the act of religious conversion, which along with blasphemy is staged in the text as the two main acts figured in translation. "In its most transparent meaning as a change of religion, conversion," asserts Gauri Viswanathan in *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*, "is arguably one of the most unsettling political events in the life of a society. This is irrespective of whether conversion involves a single individual or an entire community, whether it is forced or voluntary, or whether it is the result of proselytization or inner spiritual illumination."²⁸⁴ Conversion, defined this way, also brings to mind the "group experiences" and "collective memory" of "race origination" that Soyinka mentions in his footnotes to "The Fourth Stage" essay as possible ways in which his interpretation of the traditional Yoruba mythological essence of transition resonates with contemporary events. In light of the wide spread and thriving legacy of Christian conversion in West Africa, I read Soyinka's private, mythopoetic account of the Yoruba origin story as an attempt at a displacement of the historical narrative of the formation of the modern Yoruba people in and through their experience of missionary activity and conversion. As anthropologist-historian JDY Peel argues in his influential

²⁸³ Bhabha, 225.

²⁸⁴ Viswanathan, xi.

work on the topic, "...Yoruba are still engaged in the unfinished project of making themselves, now as Nigerians as well as Yoruba, and so have fresh stories to tell, which necessarily involve them in reconfiguring their past. No part of it has engaged them more than the religious encounter through which they first knew themselves as a people desiring to be modern."²⁸⁵ It is therefore not surprising that scholarly accounts, and as always with Soyinka, his own words, have suggested that the playwright's aesthetic theory grounded in pre-Christian Yoruba mythology is probably a powerful reaction aimed at negating his own strongly Christian upbringing and his intimate experience of missionary activity; however, as I have already shown in my reading of the textual moments of transgression in even their most trenchant declaration of cultural autonomy – the manifesto-like "Fourth Stage" essay – Soyinka's practice cannot help but betray a trace of that which it was resisting albeit displaced onto an unsuspecting footnote.

Coming to the play, the act of conversion seems to relate to the text in two major ways: first, in so far as we do not witness on stage every instance of the actual religious conversions of the concerned characters – either Professor or anyone from the driver community – the act serves as a historical precedent that becomes the condition of possibility of the events dramatized in *The Road*. What I have here in mind is the large-scale conversion of Yoruba and West African peoples to Christianity as part of the missionary activity mentioned above that accompanied the advent of British colonialism in the nineteenth century, and was instrumental in producing the cast of

²⁸⁵ JDY Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000), 310.

characters who could serve as the 'real' referents for the dramatis personae of *The Road*. Conversion sets the stage for the action in the play, which also displays Soyinka's penchant for dramatizing fictionalized versions of historical events whose most controversial example was probably in the later play, *Death and the King's Horseman*.

The significance of the scale of this conversion can be further gauged from the following conclusion from Peel's work that I have cited above: "The large-scale adoption of Christianity has been one of the master themes of modern African history; and as the third millennium beckons, it may well prove to be of world historical significance too, contributing to a decisive shift in Christianity's geopolitical placement from North to South."²⁸⁶ In fact, Soyinka's staging of conversion *within* the play – and, this is its second iteration – along with his characterization of Professor runs counter to the dominant portrayal of 'African' conversion in scholarly work on the subject. Following the pioneering even if controversial thesis of Robin Horton first published only a few years after *The Road* and *The Fourth Stage*, scholarly accounts have often favored a reading of conversion in Africa as more of an adaptive process than a confrontational one.²⁸⁷ This approach attributes significant agency to the converted and their previously held traditional religions' ability to make accommodations for the newly introduced 'worldly' religions like Christianity (or Islam) giving rise to their distinctively 'local' versions. Such a conceptualization, however, would seem to take

²⁸⁶ Peel, 1.

²⁸⁷ Robin Horton, "African Conversion," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41, no. 2 (1971), 85-108.

away from Professor's powerful and pugnacious sense of wrongful victimization by the bishop (and the Church) in the play. Here are two instances of Professor recounting his experience of blasphemy to the crowd assembled at the shack:

Prof: I hold nothing against the rainbow, considering it to be good. I hold nothing against lights, colour, finding in it mists and fragments of the Imminent grace on earth. But I said...I mean, I only sought to make my meaning clear, and I could not escape the source of my own sense of wonder...God! He called it blasphemy...You should have seen his face, oh you should have seen his glory face! He was such a busybody that bishop, and it was his just reward for sneaking up on me during Sunday school...

And again:

Prof: They cannot cast me out. I will live in the shadow of the fort. I will question the very walls for the hidden Word.

Comments such as this, exhibiting the new found zeal of the convert's faith while also testifying to his rebellious spirit, begin to represent a unique trajectory of the convert that leads Viswanathan, in her study on the status of belief in modern public life, to conclude that "conversion is a dynamic process that creates the ideal system to which the convert aspires. [But] the self styled construction of such a system is precisely what renders it heretical, and *conversion's instrumentality in producing heresy* marks it off

dramatically from assimilationist goals.”²⁸⁸ (italics added) On the one hand, the example of using conversion to service ostensibly ‘deviant’ religious aims in the play can be seen in Professor’s unrelenting attempts to recruit volunteers for his obsessive and increasingly morbid quest for ‘the Word.’ On the other hand, conversion figured as an act of translation, I suggest, can help us explain this seemingly paradoxical tendency of the convert towards committing blasphemy and stepping outside the fold. Vincente Rafael addresses this dimension of religious conversion as an ambivalent exercise of colonial clerical authority with unpredictable outcomes in his study of Spanish missionary activity in the colonized Philippines:

An appreciation of the role of translation in articulating the relationship between Christianity and colonialism provides us with a perspective from which to inquire into the Tagalogs’ response to Spanish rule...The possibility that the Tagalogs’ mode of translation differed from that of the Spaniards’ implies that native conversion confound the missionaries’ expectations.²⁸⁹

The idiom of a failed domestication of the foreign, hinted by Rafael in the above extract and advanced in studies of the history of Yoruba Christianity as well undoubtedly evokes the dynamics of “foreignization/domestication” that Lawrence Venuti discerns

²⁸⁸ Viswanathan, 122.

²⁸⁹ Rafael, x.

in the trajectories of translation and translated texts.²⁹⁰ Recast as a figure of translation, the act of conversion then complicates Soyinka's attempts to access and reanimate a supposedly unmitigated, unsullied pre-Christian Yoruba past and its mytho-poetic potential.

In refocusing the study of *The Road* around the acts of conversion and blasphemy evoked and staged in the play as opposed to the usual discussion of its ritualistic framework – expand my intention has been to argue that in fashioning an eclectic, and in some opinions esoteric, dramatic practice, Soyinka was not only displaying traits of the somewhat familiar nativist gesture of anti-Christianity-doubling-as-anti-European-colonialism, but perhaps inadvertently raising some interesting points concerning the status of belief and the scope of secularism in contemporary life as well. A revealing example from the play can be found in the comments of Say Tokyo Kid, the gangster who not only defends the presence of god in the timber he ferries in his lorry (“You think a guy of timber is dead load. What you talking kid?...There is a hundred spirits in every guy of timber trying to do you down cause you’ve trapped them in, see? There is a spirit in hell for every guy of timber?”), but is also the one to stab Professor in the end accusing him of committing the second blasphemy in the play by letting Murano the mute wear the mask of the *egungun*, a spirit of the dead that according to traditional Yoruba belief, should not be countered by the living (“I say stop playing along with this sacrilege.”) An interesting way in which these moves by Soyinka, as I have tried to

²⁹⁰ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge), 1995.

outline them, might be understood is probably as a possible attempt to answer the interesting question raised by Viswanathan in a recent essay in *PMLA*, "If, as is the case even in other fields, it is no longer acceptable to describe religion as giving way to science and technology in a straightforward narrative, how might studying the development of literary forms yield alternative descriptions that will help clarify the dynamics of transition from a religious to a secular order?"²⁹¹

Translation has figured prominently in this debate on secularism and its discontents, most frequently as a part of the operational logic of what is called "the secularization thesis." Perhaps the most famous and controversial articulation of this thesis in recent times was undertaken by Jürgen Habermas in a speech titled "Faith and Knowledge: An opening" in 2001, where he remarked:

A secularization that does not annihilate is brought about as a kind of translation.

That is what the West, as the great secularizing force in the world today, can learn from its own history. Otherwise the West will either appear simply as another crusader on the behalf of a competing religious faith, like the Arab world, or as the travelling salesman of an instrumental reason that subjects all meaning to itself.²⁹²

As a self-professed "secular humanist" that is strongly critical of religious fundamentalism it is reasonable to expect Soyinka to be aligned with this version of what Vincent Pecora calls "secularization as the translation, without residue, of earlier

²⁹¹ Viswanathan, "Secularism in the framework of Heterodoxy," *PMLA* 123.2 (2008), 468.

²⁹² Habermas, "Faith and Knowledge" at <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0111/msg00100.html>

metaphysical truths into post-metaphysical language,” which also crucially celebrates secularism as the great harbinger of modernity, whose unmistakable *ur*-moment dramatized in *The Road* is the introduction of petrol transport in the colony.²⁹³ Colonial modernity in Nigeria thus arrives in a world of incomplete secularization, but that moment is dramatized by the playwright not necessarily as a failure of secularism but as a triumph of the traditional, pre-Christian religion’s ability to transform and adapt itself as a vehicle of the modern: Ogun, is the Yoruba god of the road, Sango, to take another example, becomes the god of electricity. What I would like to leave the reader with then, is my speculative conclusion: Studying the development of Soyinka’s dramatic technique we find the following contradiction: his professed faith in secularism, in keeping with his hostility to Islam and Christianity as world religions, would imply that Soyinka is also susceptible to the recent critiques of the dominant narrative of secularism as a process that has historically homogenized the variety of actually existing religious discourse and beliefs; this narrative of secularization models itself on a particularly problematic practice of translation as “a strategy of containment,” as Niranjana has suggested with respect to translation’s colonial provenance.²⁹⁴ On the other hand, Soyinka’s recuperation of the pre-Christian Yoruba religious past in his dramatic art would make sense only as a critical response to secularism’s homogenizing narrative that raises the following question: where does

²⁹³ Vincent P. Pecora, “The post-secular: A different account,” at The Immanent Frame (<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/03/22/the-post-secular-a-different-account/>) posted on March 22, 2011. Also see “Wole Soyinka on Yoruba Religion: A conversation with Ulli Beier,” *Isokan Yoruba Magazine*, Summer 1997, Vol III No. III, and Soyinka, “Why I am secular-humanist,” Interview, *Free Inquiry*, 17.4.

²⁹⁴ Niranjana, 1992.

secularism, given an already broadened focus beyond its originary narrative in Christianity, stand with respect to endorsing pre-Christian belief systems? In insinuating this question before its time through his dramatic practice figured in translation rather than transition, as exemplified in *The Road*, Wole Soyinka is either contradicting his own aggressive secularism, or, more interestingly troubling its dominant conceptions enough to strain at its scope and continuing validity. In other words, fashioning a dramatic technique that mobilizes Yoruba mythical figures and their divine exploits on the one hand while upholding a staunchly secular ethics and politics on the other Wole Soyinka's dramatic fiction not only troubles the series of familiar oppositions predicated on a nineteenth century, even Orientalist conception of myth – belief and knowledge, reason and imagination, natural and supernatural, sacred and profane etc. – but, in co-holding apparently dissimilar practices, *The Road* already anticipates some of the critical redefinitions of the secular offered by contemporary thinkers of post-secularism. In my reading of Soyinka's writings, I propose translation, an act that is also echoed in the working out of secularization, in place of the author's favored trope of transition as a more productive figure for understanding the operation of this rich and complex dramatic technique.

VI. Conclusion

In this dissertation I have shown that translation figured as dramatic technique is a significant practice in modern and contemporary drama. The plays and prose writings of the playwrights I have studied stage a broad range of political problems, particularly well suited to the theatre, whose desired dramatic resolutions, I have argued, are inevitably achieved through mobilizing figures of translation. While the now widespread use of theatrical terms like 'staging' and 'scene' for literary critical readings is perhaps apposite in so far as they become literalized when discussing dramatic texts, my use of the term 'figures' throughout the thesis carries a heavier burden. I have used

the term deliberately so as to draw attention to at least two significant critical gestures: first, on becoming figurable as a dramatic technique, following a similar move made by Fredric Jameson in his reconceptualization of the representation of class contradiction in cultural texts, translation becomes conceptually intelligible and not just a mere instrument of transfer of meaning, which regrettably still remains the dominant understanding of the act outside a small and selective coterie of humanities scholars in the academia.²⁹⁵ The second move is to draw attention to the fact that the readings are not just thematic but also a study of translation as a dramatic technique and narrative strategy. As a broad range of contemporary and postcolonial geo-political preoccupations questions of autochthony, linguistic and cultural self-determination, displaced and stateless peoples, movements of gendered migrant labor, neoliberal globalization and the legacies of socialist ways of life, the re-emergence of belief and contestations over the desirability of the secular in the public sphere are all profoundly important themes variously approached by Utpal Dutt, Brian Friel, David Edgar and Wole Soyinka. What is specifically interesting, as I have tried to show, is how often these concerns are staged, debated and provisionally un/settled in their texts through the use of translation. What my work on translation attempts to establish is a formal rather than substantive logic of comparison with the aim of producing a new literary-theoretical space within which these diverse authors and texts can be read. This in turn complicates the dominant definition of 'world literature,' by pointing out the limitation

²⁹⁵ For the earliest articulation of this idea see Fredric Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: Dog Day Afternoon as a Political Film," *College English* 38.8 (Apr 1977), 845.

of its logic of classification whereby a focus on the novel has resulted in insufficient attention to genres like drama. It also, hopefully, troubles to some extent a widespread practice in the field that valorizes the accumulation of endless empirical examples as under-theorized case studies of an agreed upon model that doesn't quite theorize/destabilize its heuristic capabilities in the first place.

Although this has been a study of a few authors and texts produced in a small period of time between the 1960s and the 1990s, it has been a period when ideas of the theatrical and the political were passionately contested and profoundly changed. A prominent manifestation of this conceptual shift both inside the university as well as in the space of the theatre has been the steady retreat from and even denunciation of the literary text in favor of theatricality and performance in drama and theatre studies. However, I place my work within an emerging trend of scholarship that now seeks to revisit this text/performance divide not so much to set it right in favor of the literary as to argue for the unsustainability of such a binary as well as pointing out some of the exuberant excesses of performance studies.²⁹⁶ In each of the chapters I have tried to show how practices of theoretically informed close reading of written drama supplemented by equally scrupulous attention to relevant historical materials can open up different perspectives on the poetics and politics of texts that are rarely read outside grids of national literary formations.

²⁹⁶ I am thinking of the work of Julie Peters, *The Theatre of the Book, 1480-1880: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), and W.B. Worthen, *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), but also Jody Enders' slightly earlier book, *Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Multilingualism in the text of theatre is not new even if it has been understudied, perhaps as an enduring even if slightly misplaced consequence of a reductive reading of drama by the most famous theorist of the novel, Mikhail Bakhtin, who, drawing upon a limited repertoire of naturalist drama, had somewhat counter-intuitively deemed the genre incapable of being dialogic and heteroglot.²⁹⁷ I have tried to read translation as a dramatic technique that both constitutes and negotiates the multilingual texture of drama, a reading I believe is going to become increasingly salient in approaching a range of interesting texts in the contemporary moment. The drama that concerns itself with the ethics and politics of language, and questions of translation and multilingualism in particular, it seems is poised for a great future as more playwrights (and other authors) attempt to complicate the limiting assumptions of monolingualism behind much of the scholarship on and reception of the genre. David Edgar's new play *Written on the Heart* (2011), for instance, which is now being staged by the RSC at Stratford-upon-Avon dramatizes the making of the *King James Bible*, the hallowed text that (along with Shakespeare's *First Folio*) is commonly thought to have had a lasting influence on the English language. Occasioned by the 400th anniversary of its landmark publication, the King James version emerges in Edgar's play as very much a work of collective authorship and more a demystified compilation of the best bits of previous translations than being an entirely new translation. The figure of the translator and the 'weaponization of translation' as high stakes participants in military-strategic

²⁹⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Ed. & Trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). For a discussion of this aspect of Bakhtin's work see Marvin Carlson, "Theater and Dialogism," in *Critical Theory and Performance* eds. Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

activities has also been central to a number of recent American plays written in the aftermath of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan like George Packer's *Betrayed* (2008) and Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger in a Baghdad Zoo* (2009). Finally, keeping in mind recent experiments in fiction like Amitav Ghosh's massive, ongoing *Ibis Trilogy* (2008-) with its polyglot texture and daring attempts to imagine a diversified antiquity for contemporary globalization, I believe it would be interesting to explore if and how the vectors of translation figured as a narrative/dramatic technique in this dissertation can be productively extended to other genres.

Bibliography

Ackerman, Alan. "The Prompter's Box: Toward a Close Reading of Modern Drama."

Modern Drama 50:4 (2007): 475-486.

Albert, Lord edited and Milman Parry collected. *Serbo- Croatian Heroic Songs*.

Cambridge, Harvard University Press; Belgrade, Serbian Academy of Sciences,

1954.

Balibar, Etienne. "Europe as Borderland." Alexander von Humboldt Lecture in Human Geography, University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands, Nov 10, 2004.

_____. *We, the people of Europe?* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2004.

Bassnet, Susan and Harish Trivedi. *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London & New York: Routledge, 1999.

Banerjee, Sumanta. *In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalite Movement in India*. Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.

Bermann, Sandra. and Michael Wood edited *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Beissinger, Margaret, Jane Tylus, and Susanne Wofford edited. *Epic traditions in the contemporary world: the poetics of community*. Berkeley, Californi: University of California, 1999.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*.New York: Shoken Books, 1968.

_____. The Task of Translator, 1923. Translated by Harry John in *Illuminations*, 69-83. New York: Shoken Books, 1968.

_____. The Storyteller. Edited by Howard Island and Michael W Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935-1938*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

- Beier, Ulli. "Wole Soyinka on Yoruba Religion: A conversation with Ulli Beier." *Isokan Yoruba Magazine*, Summer 1997, Vol III No. III. Accessed October 14, 2011
<http://yoruba.org/Magazine/Summer97/File3.htm>
- Bermann, Sandra and Michael Wood edited. *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bose, Mandakranta edited. *The Ramayana Revisited* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Translated by John Willet. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.
- _____. "Short Organum for the Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre* edited and translated by John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964
- Carlson, Marvin. *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theatre*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Chatterjee, Piya. *A Time for Tea: Women, labor, and Post/Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Churchill, Caryl. *Mad Forest: A play from Romania*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1996.
- Cole, Catherine, "Wole Soyinka's View of Citizenship in Structurally Adjusted Lagos: The Beatification of Area Boy." Conference paper presented at Columbia University, May 6, 2011.

- Corbette, Tony. *Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the tribe*. Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2002.
- Damas, Marius. *Approaching Naxalbari*. South Asia Books, 1991.
- Damrosch, David. *What is World Literature?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*. Translated by Mary Ann Caws. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998.
- _____. *Politics of Friendship*. Translated by George Collins. New York: Verso, 1997.
- _____. "Enlightenment Past and To Come." Translated by Gulliver Cragg. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 2004. Accessed 09/14/2011
<http://mondediplo.com/2004/11/06derrida>
- _____. *The Other Heading* translated by Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press 1992).
- _____. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York & London: Routledge, 1994.
- _____. *Monolingualism of the Other or, the Prostheses of Origin*. Translated by Patricik Mensa. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Derrida, Jacques and Jurgen Habermas. "What Binds Europeans Together: A plea for a Common Foreign Policy, Beginning in the Heart of Europe." Translated by Max Pensky. *Constellations* 10 (2003): 291-297.

- Devi, Mahasweta. *Chotti Munda and his Arrow*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. London: Blackwell, 2003.
- Dutt, Utpal. *Natakasamagra. Vols I-VII* [Collected Plays Vols I-VII]. Calcutta: Mitra & Ghosh Publishers, 1995-1999.
- _____. *Shakespearer shomaajh chetana*
- _____. *Towards a Revolutionary Theatre*. Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, 1982.
- Duyker, Edward. *Tribal Guerillas: The Santals of West Bengal and the Naxalite Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Edgar, David. *Pentecost*. London: Nick Hern Books, 1995.
- _____. *The Shape of the Table*. London: Nick Hern Books, 1993
- _____. *The Prisoner's Dilemma*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2004
- _____. *Continental Divide*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2004
- _____. *Destiny*. London : Eyre Methuen, 1978
- _____. *Maydays*. London : Eyre Methuen, 1983
- Enders, Jody. *Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Foley, John Miles. *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces," translated by Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16: 1 (Spring, 1986): 22-27.
- Garner, Stanton. "Rewriting Europe: Pentecost and the Crossroads of Migration." *Essays in Theatre/Études théâtrales*, 16:1, (November 1997): 3-14.

George, Olakunle, "Missionary Moments: Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka."

Conference paper presented at Pittsburg, 2006.

Ghosh, Nirmal. *Naxalbadi Andolan o Bangla Sahitya*. Kolkata: Karuna Prakashani, 1980.

Guha, Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999.

Gutas, Dimitri. *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.

Gunawardane, A. J. "Theatre as Weapon: An Interview with Utpal Dutt." *The Drama Review: TDR* (Spring, 1971): 224-237.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Faith and Knowledge." Speech accepting the Peace Price of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association Paulskirche, Frankfurt, 14 October

2001. Url: <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0111/msg00100.html> Accessed on 14 October, 2011.

_____. "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14.1, April 2006.

Hjelmslev, Louis. *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. Translated by Francis Whitfield. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961.

Horton, Robin. "African Conversion." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41, no. 2 (1971), 85-108.

Iftikar, Dadi, Leeza Ahmady and Reem Fadda. *Tarjama/Translation: Contemporary art from the Middle-East, Central Asia and its diasporas*. New York: ArteEast, 2009.

Jeyifo, Biodun. *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Karlsson, Bengt G. and Tanka B. Subba ed. *Indigeneity in India*. London: Kegan Paul, 2006.

Katrak, Ketu. *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1986.

Laclau, Ernesto. "Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject." *Differences* 7:1 (1995): 146-164.

Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. London: Verso, 1985.

Lenin, V.I. *What is to be done?* Translated by Joe Fineberg and George Hanna. New York and London: Penguin, 1989.

Lukas, J. Anthony. "Indian is in jail but play goes on." *New York Times*, November 25, 1965. Accessed 09/ 14/2011

<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=FA0E13FC3F5A157A93C7AB178AD95F418685F9>

_____. "Once a Week in a Calcutta Theatre: US 'Atrocities' in Vietnam." *New York Times*, December 21, 1966. Accessed 09/ 14/2011

<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F70B1EFA395F137A93C3AB1789D95F428685F9>

Lelyveld, Joseph. "Play in Calcutta stages uprising." *New York Times*, April 7, 1968. Accessed

October, 14 2011 url:

<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F10B17FF395913748DDDAE08>

[94DC405B888AF1D3&scp=1&sq=Play%20in%20Calcutta%20stages%20uprising
&st=cse](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2004/mar/20/theatre.politicaltheatre)

Lukacs, Georg. *Theory of the novel*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974.

Mahoney, John. Enter, Stage Left. *Guardian*, Friday 19 March 2004. Accessed 09/14/2011
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2004/mar/20/theatre.politicaltheatre>.

Niranjana, Tejaswany. *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism and the Colonial context*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Ogunba, Oyin. *The Movement of Transition: A Study of the play of Wole Soyinka*. Nigeria: Ibadan UP, 1975.

Painter, Susan. *Edgar - The Playright* (London: Methuen Drama, 1996).

Pecora, Vincent P. "The post-secular: A different account," at *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion and the Public Sphere*
(<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/03/22/the-post-secular-a-different-account/>)
posted on March 22, 2011. Accessed on October 14 2011.

Peel, JDY. *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000.

Peters, Julie. *The Theatre of the Book, 1480-1880: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Piscator, Erwin. *The Political Theatre. Translated with chapter introductions and notes by Hugh Rorrison*. New York: Avon Books, 1978, c1963.

Puchner, Martin. *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

- Quayson, Ato. *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: orality & history in the work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka & Ben Okri*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Radhakrishnan, R. "Why Compare?" *New Literary History* 40.3 (2009): 453-471
- Raghavan, V, edited. *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1980).
- Rafael, Vicente L. *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Ray, Rabindra. *The Naxalites and Their Ideology*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Reinelt, Janelle. "Performing Europe: Identity Formation for a 'New' Europe," *Theatre Journal* 53:3 (2001): 365-387.
- Roth, Maya E. and Sara Freeman edited. *International Dramaturgy: Translations & Transformations in the Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*. Brussels: PIE-Peter Lang Press, 2008.
- Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*. New York: Picador, 2000.
- Sakai, Naoki. *Translation and Subjectivity*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997
- _____. "Translation as a filter." Translated by Gavin Walker. *Transeuropeennes: International Journal of Critical Thought*, March 25, (2010): 1-16.
- Schechner, Richard. "The New Look." *The Tulane Drama Review* 11.1 (1966): 22-23

Singh, Prakash. *The Naxalite Movement in India*. Delhi: Rupa and Co., 2006.

Soyinka, Wole. "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the origin of Yoruba Tragedy." 1968, In *The Morality of Art* edited by Douglas William Jefferson , 119-34. London: Taylor and Francis, 1969.

_____. "Why I am secular-humanist." Interview in *Free Inquiry*, 17.4. Accessed October 14, 2011

http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/soyinka_17_4.html

_____. *Death and the King's Horseman*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1975.

_____. *The Interpreters*. London: Deutsch, 1965.

_____. *The Road* in *Collected Plays 1*, 205-206. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973.

Spencer, Jenny. "Performing Translation in Contemporary Anglo American Drama." *Theatre Journal* 59 (2007): 389-410.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.

_____. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Spencer, Jenny. "Performing Translation in Contemporary Anglo-American Drama." *Theatre Journal* 59 (2007): 389-410.

Srinivasa Iyengar, K.R. edited. *Asian Variations in Ramayana*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1983.

- Larsen, Stephan. *A writer and his gods : a study of the importance of Yoruba myths and religious ideas to the writing of Wole Soyinka*. Stockholm : University of Stockholm, Department of the History of Literature, 1983.
- Todorova, Maria. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford & New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997.
- _____. *Imagining the Balkans – Updated Edition* . Oxford & New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- _____. ed *Translation Studies Reader*
- Viswanathan, Gauri. *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- _____. "Secularism in the framework of Heterodoxy." *PMLA* 123.2 (2008), 466-476.
- Weber, Samuel. "A Touch of Translation: On Walter Benjamin's "Task of the Translator"" in *Nation, Language and the Ethics of Translation* edited by Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood, 65-79. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005.
- Weiss, Peter. "Fourteen Propositions for a Documentary Theatre." Translated by A Favorini *World Theatre* 17 (1968): 375-389
- _____. "The Material and the Models: Notes towards a Definition of Documentary Theatre." *Theatre Quarterly* 1/1 (1971): 41-43
- Worthen, W.B. *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

