Second Writing or Authorial Control? Self-Translation and Bilingual Creativity in Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*

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Abstract

The fundamental questions underlying what is actually meant by author and translation are raised by Rabindranath Tagore's self-translation from Bengali (1910) to English (1912). This paper does not seek to reproduce Tagore's original work, but rather to describe the process of what it calls second writing, a creative process of restructuring, using imagery and drawing on cultural references, for a new global audience. The paper looks at five selected Tagorean poems in both versions through the prism of Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and research on bilingual cognition to reflect the way Tagore manoeuvred between devotional lyricism in Bengali and spiritual sensibility in the West. This analysis shows that there were two-fold reasons for his self-translation. It assisted in his international reception, and it redefined his poetic voice in a new literary system. The discoveries here proposed make a bold claim to the original and the translation, suggesting that Tagore's bicultural or bilingual practice is a form of creative authorial practice rather than a mere derivative of the original. The implications for translation studies in the Postcolonial context, and for multilingualism and authorship, are explored.

Keywords: Self-translation, Bilingual Creativity, Polysystem Theory, Postcolonial Translation, Authorial Agency, Gitanjali.

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Introduction

When self-translation is a part of the process, translation's position in the original/copy antinomy becomes unsettled and ultimately ruptures. The distinction between creation and reproduction is not clear when the writer and the translator coincide. A new critical vocabulary is needed to account for this. The best known and most controversial instance of such self-translations in modern world literature is Rabindranath Tagore's own Bengali *Gitanjali* (1910) translated into English (1912). Historically important for him, but still relevant questions for today's translation studies: what does it mean to be bilingual as a creative artist; what are the implications of postcolonial agency; and what is the politics of literary circulation?

Tagore (1861-1941) is a poet, philosopher, composer, educator and Nobel award winner already an established giant in the Bengali literary scene when he started on the journey of self-translation that would propel him to international stardom. English *Gitanjali*: Song Offerings was the basis for the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature, and the work is not a literal translation nor in any literal sense an original composition, but in a way, more of another, more interesting thing. The most careful English translators of Tagore have noted that Tagore was not just a translator of himself into English, but a poet in two languages who produced an aesthetic in English that was different from the aesthetic he produced in Bengali (Radice, 1985, p. 27). This comment brings us to the main question of this paper. Can the English *Gitanjali* be considered as a creative act, a second literature, or a self-presentation or even authorial control, a strategic presentation in the foreign literary market?

This paper will argue that the answer is both, and it is this simultaneity that renders Tagore's practice theoretically significant. Self-translation, as Susan Bassnett states, has blurred the original/translation binary (Bassnett, 2014, p. 142), and Tagore's case illustrates the need for this dissolution as well as its illuminating effects. Based upon the theories of polysystem analysis (Even-Zohar, 1990) and on research on multilingual cognition (Grosjean, 2010), the paper focuses on five poems (12, 35, 36, 63,

and 73) it examines to explore and discuss how consistently Tagore varied his structural, tonal, and cultural features in his switch between languages. They have been said to be not acts of capitulation to western tastes, but rather a form of active bilingual ingenuity, to a text that no longer shares the literary space of its Bengali version, but does not displace it.

There are substantial implications to this reframing. It changes the view frame from faithfulness to innovation, from corruption to creative transformation. It also situates Tagore in the wider discussions regarding postcolonial translation, world writing, and multilingual authorship that are far beyond the scope of *Gitanjali*. The paper is developed with the help of a literature review, a theoretical framework, a careful examination of the selected texts and a discussion of the broader implications, culminating in a reflection on the implications of Tagore's bilingual practice for modern translation studies.

The method used is a combination of micro-level (textual comparison) and macro-level (systemic analysis). This two-fold practice is similar to Tagore's own two-fold practice. On the micro level, by analysing selected Bengali and English poems, the exact points of departure will be identified. These are the times when Tagore decided to shorten, expand or modify and interpret his decisions on these bases as made on purpose and not as mistakes or omissions in translation. In order to locate and evaluate such decisions, two types of theories are available at the macro level: polysystem theory and bilingualism studies. The method abates three important gaps in current scholarship. These are the relative lack of detailed comparative textual analysis, the lack of an engagement with bilingualism research in Tagore studies and the minimisation of his creative and strategic agency. Poems 12, 35, 36, 63, and 73 (the five selected for analysis) represent various ways in which transformation takes place, ranging from the blurring of politics and the reduction of theology to the absence of embodied imagery of devotion. This allows the argument to touch the entire gamut of Tagore's self-translating practice, not just on the mode of departure from the Bengali tradition.

Literature Review

Over the last few decades, the scholarly discipline of self-translation has grown, albeit at uneven rates, in general, and especially in the context of non-European literary traditions. As a free author-translator, compared with an external transcriber, the author-translator in self-translation enjoys a degree of freedom that dissolves the very dichotomy between a source and a target text, in the opinion of Rainer Grutman, the writer of the entry on self-translation in the *Routledge encyclopaedia* (2009, p. 257). Jan Walsh Hokenson and Marcella Munson's 2007 work, *The Bilingual Text*, is a comprehensive historical overview of the practice and a study that shows that the results of self-translation are not copies, but rather variants influenced by the audience, culture and the evolving voice of the writer. Neither one nor the other account of Tagore's practice suggests that it was a one-off or a deviation from his literary identity as a Bengali writer.

The study of self-translation as a genre has not been systematically treated to a great extent in the Indian scholarly circles. Sujit Mukherjee's *Translation as Discovery* (1994) paved the way for a fruitful line of enquiry concerning the significance of translation in the evolution of modern Indian literature, a study that mostly focused on the translation of texts from Indian languages to English. Although the author does not discuss the instances in which the native author translates her own work, Niranjana's postcolonial analysis of colonial translators' strategies for creating non-Western works in the framework of European epistemic systems is essential. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her essay "The Politics of Translation" (1993), "translation always involves mediation of cultural hierarchies" (p. 181) when texts cross language lines. Spivak's arguments can be best applied to third-party translation; when the colonised writer is also the translator, power dynamics become much more complicated.

Tagore's role in this scholarship is an interesting one. He's cited a lot and seldom studied in the sense of a self-translator in the theoretical sense. The Western praise and reception of the English translation of the *Gitanjali* by Western admirers like W. B. Yeats was often interpreted as the India that was available for Western

consumption—it was a spiritual panacea to modernist culture. In his introduction, he wrote that it gave him "a world I have dreamed all my life long" (Yeats, 1912, p. x), the response being more an Orientalist projection than an actual decision of Tagore's. Edward Thompson was less complimentary, pointing out that the English translations had made the Bengali originals "too ethereal for readers who have grown up in the culture out of which they came" (Thompson, 1926, p. 214). The structural aspect was also very clearly emphasised by Sisir Kumar Das, editor of the official Sahitya Akademi version of the English poetry of Tagore: The English Poems do not include the structural or rhythmic elements of his Bengali verse, but rather a different set of 'Biblical cadences' which are adapted to a Western reader (Das, 1996, p. 67).

This is not untrue, but their observations tend to focus on Tagore's losses or compromises. This formulation has been questioned by scholars of his bilingualism. Amartya Sen pointed out that Tagore was never restricted to any single language, that he lived in two worlds – the Bengali world and the English world – and that bilingualism was a natural part of his creative process (Sen, 2005, p. 94). For Radice, the English translations are in themselves works of poetry as original as Tagore's originals in Bengali (1985, p. 27). Indira Chaudhuri read the *Gitanjali* in English as Tagore created for himself the image of the voice of the East – this role was empowering and limiting (Chaudhuri, 1999, p. 56).

It is important to add some background on the self-translation of *Gitanjali* for scholarship. In his foundational study of the political aspects of Tagore's self-translation, Rabinowitz (2002) examines the English *Gitanjali* as a product of a witty and strategic negotiation between Tagore's spiritual vision and the expectations of Western literary reception. In their highly ambitious anthology of Tagore's writing, Alam and Chakravarty (2011) also prove how much Tagore's bilingual writing defies an easy dichotomy of original and derivative and how much it is an independent contribution to world literature, placing the English poems in their own right. The self-translations of Tagore have also received continuous attention, particularly from the writings of Dyson (1991), as a basis for comparative textual analysis that the present study uses. Such studies

based on *Gitanjali* reaffirm the point that the self-translation of Tagore calls for a study that is independent of the Bengali original and not a mere process of cultural adaptation. However, there are three significant shortcomings in the current scholarship. Firstly, there is an apparent lack of close comparative textual study of specific Bengali and English poems; researchers have rarely studied them side by side. Secondly, the cognitive aspects of Tagore's bilingualism, such as the influence of the two languages on his poetic decisions, are rarely examined in relation to the contemporary research on bilingualism. Recently, there have been analytical tools to consider, tools developed by François Grosjean, which have not been used consistently in Tagore's practice so far: "Bilinguals are a linguistic reality who live in an integrated way" (2010, p. 13). Third, although scholars like Spivak and Niranjana have placed Tagore's self-translation in the context of colonial power, they have usually not focused enough on Tagore's creative agency. However, a more significant departure comes from Harish Trivedi's notion of "authorial self-inscription in the global literary marketplace" (1993, p. 79), which takes into consideration the systemic forces that shaped Tagore's decisions and the creative intelligence he brought to bear on those forces.

To be fair, a later chapter by Anjali Nerlekar (2019) on 'bilingual poetics' suggests that self-translation is not a translation of meanings, but rather a reinvention of the text in another language (p. 87). This formulation has something to do with the practice of Tagore. He wasn't pretending to be himself but uncovering his Bengali poems in a new style of language and in the process purifying their essence. Likewise, Sherry Simon's (1996, p. 12) idea of the doubleness of the bilingual imagination helps to shed light on the creative condition that makes such re-entry possible. This is the ability to live in two linguistic worlds and to create echoes that a monolingual writer cannot. This understanding of translation as the act of putting in place a meaning in another space, instead of the simple transmission of a message, is echoed by what Antoine Berman (1992, p. 13) has said: "Translation is the deployment of meaning in another space, rather than the simple transmission of a message. Tagore was not just translating his Bengali poems into English. He was pioneering a new area of literature.

Postcolonial scholars have also placed Tagore in the literature of colonial asymmetries. While cultural hybridity as a place of negotiation, as described by Homi Bhabha (1994), can be applied directly to Tagore's self-translation, which cannot be reduced to either pure agency or pure complicity, the concept of hybridity also finds application in other forms of translation. The idea of cultural hybridity as a space of negotiation, as described by Homi Bhabha (1994), is also applicable to other modes of translation, albeit in a different manner than in the case of Tagore's self-translation, which cannot be reduced to either pure agency or pure complicity. Such negotiations, however, are carried out within a systemic frame as defined by Pascale Casanova's (2004) world republic of letters and reveal how writers from peripheral literary cultures are forced to adjust their writing to the aesthetic norms of the dominant centres to achieve international success. The use of Biblical cadences, the depersonalisation of imagery and the softening of political allusions can be interpreted in this manner as a conscious entrance. The strategy was not only based on the knowledge of a poet, but also her close familiarity with two languages as a bilingual writer. The next section builds the theoretical tools needed to bring together these perspectives in an integrated analytical framework.

The juxtaposition of Tagore's self-translation in these theoretical contexts raises issues and questions extending beyond the historical moment itself. It also affects the way we read any piece of writing that has been translated across languages and cultures, as well as by the author himself. This notion that fidelity is the only standard for judging the quality of a translation has been disputed for a long time in translation studies, but it has remained a staple of popular literary discourse. Self-translating writers are graded more on what they changed than what they made. As the reception of Tagore shows, the price of this evaluative regime was a reductive and incomplete picture of Tagore in the West during most of the twentieth century. It was far from the rich complexity which his Bengali readers admired. This was an image that Tagore had to create for himself, with his own self-translating decisions. Such a complex theoretical and historical analysis of these decisions—rather than one based on an idealised notion of transparency—produces a more fruitful

framework for evaluating them, one that is sensitive to the creative dynamics of contact between languages, as described by Ulrich Weinreich (1968, p. 1). The critical study of this aspect of bilingual literary production has been neglected by translation studies.

Theoretical Framework

This paper builds on two related theoretical frameworks. The first is Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, which situates literary texts in systemic structures on a large scale. The second is research into bilingual cognition, which reveals the possibilities of creativity for writers who live in the interlanguageness. These two frameworks can be deployed together in this paper to follow the process of Tagore's self-translation both from the outside and from the inside.

Even-Zohar (1990) proposed the concept of literature as a multiple system—a system of different systems overlapping and coinciding to some degree (p. 11). In this polysystem, the texts that were translated do not have a predetermined peripheral status; instead, their location is determined by the historical, cultural and aesthetic factors. A receiving literary culture may be at the hub of the polysystem instead of at the fringes, when it feels that it has a need for aesthetic models that the existing canon cannot meet, in which case it is called a gap (p. 19).

The self-translations of Tagore are one of the outstanding examples of this phenomenon. But Tagore already played a pivotal role in the Bengali literary polysystem of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, having made a huge impact on the development of modern Bengali poetry and prose. He was introduced to an altogether new literary system when he translated the *Gitanjali* into English in 1912. This was the Anglophone world of high modernism, formally experimental and as open as it was to what it saw as Eastern wisdom. The English *Gitanjali* immediately gravitated towards the centre of that system. It was endorsed by Yeats and Pound, and was awarded the Nobel Prize in less than one year since publication. His work addressed a specific need in the system: it presented European aesthetic conventions as an alternative to the eyes of the West, in its universalising spiritual language, in its rhythms of the King James Bible, and in its contemplative simplicity.

Pascale Casanova (2004) is an important extension of polysystem theory. Casanova's world republic of letters is made up of the circulation of literary works, which are ruled by the battle for recognition (p. 12). Tagore's self-translations were not simply linguistic but strategic moves in another domain of literary legitimation. He introduced himself into this world republic by rendering his poems into English, but also took up the role of being a spokesperson for the East. This position made him popular but also limited his interpretations and reception of his work.

An alternative perspective is offered by bilingualism studies. One of the major works in the field, François Grosjean's work, considers bilinguals as not two monolinguals in one person, but as unique speakers who have an integrated linguistic repertoire (Grosjean, 2010, p. 6). This repertoire is not binary, but rather bilinguals rely on synthesised linguistic awareness. In the case of a self-translator like Tagore, the English *Gitanjali* was not a mechanical transliteration. It was an exploration of those Bengali poems in a bilingual consciousness which could see both languages simultaneously.

This doubleness of the bilingual imagination can be glimpsed in Sherry Simon's (1996) notion of "doubleness" (p. 12). This is the ability to live and write in two language worlds at once and to create echoes that don't exist in the monolingual world. Anjali Nerlekar (2019) comes close to capturing the essence of self-translation in her description of it as re-entry. Bilingual authors are not simply translating from one language to another but rather entering into the text in another language (p. 87). These are all ways of understanding Tagore's imagination, and his use of Biblical rhythms and his universalised spiritual vocabulary, as re-entry, rather than as a loss. This poem was opened, heard in a new way and rewritten in a new key.

Both of these frameworks support one another. The English form of *Gitanjali* can be understood with the help of the Polysystem theory. This contributes to an understanding of why some cultural references were left out, why some rhythms were used, and why the spiritual was emphasised over the political. Bilingualism research helps give answers to the question of how Tagore made these changes. His bilingual identity enabled him to live in two languages:

Bengali and English. These are all part of the claim that Tagore's self-translation was not a concession to Western taste nor a betrayal of his Bengali audience. It was an innovative bilingual project, a project that resulted in a new literary creation that had different significance in a different cultural setting.

The third theoretical approach that can be referred to in this regard is the taxonomy of translation offered by Roman Jakobson (1959), who distinguishes intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic kinds of translation. What is remarkable about Jakobson's schema in this context is that in his scheme, self-translation is not an easy case of interlingual translation. It obviously doesn't fit there either, but it does fit there because there is no sharp division. Self-translation falls in between interlingual and original composition. It is a threshold that Jakobson's schema didn't imagine at all, and Tagore's practice forces us to theorise new ways. The cognitive aspects of this crossing of the line are brought to light by Grosjean's (2010, pp. 29-34) observation that bilingual writers do not just have two different language systems, but an internalised cognitive space that is shaped by the interferences, borrowings and code-switching that occur to the user because two languages are used within the same cognitive domain. For Tagore, the decades of reading, writing and thinking in both Bengali and English were no longer restricted to the language of the parallel system. These relationships were very close. As it was, there was already a Bengali poem written in 1910 for him. It wasn't a translated text but a field of affordances and resonances which he was able to call up again when he returned to the work two years later with his bilingual consciousness. Tagore's choices are therefore not only contextualised, but also in the context of the convergence of polysystem theory and bilingualism research on these points. It also allows for the understanding of those decisions as constitutively creative, not adaptive.

Tagore's Self-Translation Practice

It is suggestive that Tagore himself has written about the process. When he was asked to write a letter to William Rothenstein, he wrote the following: "The soul of a poem must find for itself a new rhythm when transplanted into another tongue" (Tagore, as quoted in

Das, 1996, p. 52). The word 'transplanted' says it all. It suggests a growth process, not mechanical, but organic, that takes place in new soil, and that is accompanied by all the adaptations which growth implies. The five poems under discussion in this section – 12, 35, 36, 63, and 73 – present examples of the process of transplantation in various forms of transformation, tonal shift, metaphoric translation, political softening, and doctrinal reframing.

4.1 *Poem 12*

Ekla cholo re is the first line of Poem 12 and is perhaps one of the most politically charged Tagore Bengali poems. It was written during the Swadeshi movement of 1905 and had an unmistakable defiant tone of solidarity in its cultural context. The Bengali original is given below.

> যদি তোর ডাক শুনে কেউ না আসে / তবে একলা চলো রে।
>
> If no one replies to your call, then go your way alone" (If no one answers upon your calling, then go your way by itself.)

Ekla cholo re was not just a personal counselling but a political call which later became an anthem of self-reliant resistance, as Gandhi joined onto it. The English translation of Tagore's Bengali statement, "If they answer not to thy call walk alone", removes the urgency from the Bengali imperative. The 'political register' is lost, and only a 'spiritual register' remains, that of personal integrity. This is an ironic instance of Spivak's remark that "colonial translation negotiates the asymmetry of power between languages" (1993, p. 181). This negotiation is done by Tagore himself, and it becomes a universalised moral principle that could be understood by the readers of the West within their own moral frameworks.

4.2 *Poem 35*

Poem 35 is a parallel case. The Bengali original begins with a plea for the strength to endure with patience both happiness and sadness, and then goes on in repeated and bhakti-saturated invocations that carry strong social undertones, one of which specifically refuses to "bend my knees before insolent might", a phrase that is clearly readable as a reference to colonial power. The English version

translates the prayer in a completely different tone: “This is my prayer to thee, my Lord, strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart. From the social critique of insolent power has emerged an interior spiritual petition, from the political has emerged the psychological. Bassnett (2014) describes translation as “a rewriting that reflects the ideological positions of the translator” (p. 47), and in this instance, he does not mean that the translator’s ideologies were imposed on Tagore, but those of Tagore that had to be communicated to his international readership.

This change is particularly noteworthy because of the way that it makes a structural change at the address level. The Bengali poem alternates between first-person petition and second-person challenge, with the poet appealing to God and second person to an unnamed agent of opposition in the second person, and so the poem evokes an interesting moral and political dynamism. The English version overcomes this contradiction by throwing out the adversarial register altogether and retaining only the devotional interior petition. This yields a more tightly-knit but far less emotionally complex poem. The tendency to deal with and resolve the productive tensions rather than preserve them in the English versions is typical of Tagore’s own practice of self-translating, which makes his works characteristically one-note and contemplative. Grosjean’s model of the bilingual writer implies that these are not only tactical compromises to the less advanced reader but also mark the respective emotional and aesthetic affordances that Bengali and English afforded to Tagore as modes of creativity. This variation in language texture created the formal possibilities and what was redundant in each language.

4.3 *Poem 36*

The change in poem 36 is less pronounced but no less instructive. Emphasising the little self, or ক্ষুদ্র আত্মা, a key aspect of bhakti poetics, the Bengali puts the individual human in humble relation to divine plenitude. The English translates this as “Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows”, and eliminates the metaphysics of the smallness of God and man. André Lefevere (1992) has redefined translation as ‘refraction’, which means that the text is

changed to conform to the 'ideological and poetological constraints of the receiving culture' (p. 8). It is here that Tagore finds a substitute for refraction, in just this way: the bhakti metaphor gets refracted through a Christian humility and a stoic self-governance, and the poem speaks to the ethical landscapes of the West, but without the theological force of its Bengali form.

This refraction is at the level of rhythm and of imagery. The Bengali poem is in a metrical line that is part of the classical tradition of Rabindrasangeet, where the weight and contours of each line are carefully considered, and can be translated into English only with a significant formal re-conception. Tagore tries neither to imitate it; he uses the cadenced style of prose-poetry that is proper to the King James Bible, a sacred book for Anglophones of the early twentieth century. However, the substitution is fitting: the Bengali metre had the power of a devotional tradition for the original reader, and so has the Biblical cadence for its English-speaking counterparts. Lefevere's idea of refraction should therefore be viewed as a formal, semantic and affective process. It isn't a replacement for any one word, but rather a transformation in the way the poem relates to the reader. The Bengali poem is delivered via the attraction of a familiar musical mode, while the English poem is delivered via the weight of a familiar scriptural mode. The formal strategies are quite different, but the communicative purpose is very similar.

4.4 *Poem 63*

In Poem 63, the analysis is extended to the fields of embodiment. The Bengali is as follows:

> আমার মাথা নত করো হে, / তোমার চরণ ধূলার উপরে।
>
> Bow my head, O Lord, before you, and touch the dust of my feet.

This is a very much part of Vaishnava devotional practice, and physical prostration is an act of surrender to God, through the physical body. In the English version, this physical imagery is completely missing: "Let all my pride of self be drowned in the tears of repentance, that I may call thee my God. The body vanishes, and

the Christian moral psychology's interior states of pride and repentance take its place". In fact, Niranjana (1992) suggests that colonial translation practices "always produced non-Western texts within the episteme of European rationality and morality" (p. 12), and here it is surprising that Tagore himself translates, rather than being distorted by colonial forces.

In poem 63, the body is not simply being accommodated by the culture but displaced by the theology. Physical prostration, touch and gesture in Vaishnava bhakti is not a metaphor for spiritual humility; it is spiritual humility. The shift from prostration to penitential interiority in the English translation is a Protestant theological logic of the faith that is first for the interior, and not the outward behaviour. Tagore surely knew this difference. He was also well-versed in the differences between devotional embodiment, in the Hindu tradition, and moral inwardness, in Christian tradition, through his extensive engagement with Western philosophy and theology, which he documented through his essays and letters. The substitution in poem 63, then, is theologically hybrid, rather than culturally innocent. In fact, he was recreating the metaphysics of the devotional act that is readable to a Westerner. This was a sort of intellectual hospitality, which cost the original poem its most special and untouchable delight, that the Divine is found through, not against, the physical body.

4.5 *Poem 73*

The most radical departure is in Poem 73. In the Bengali translation, manual labour is directly revered.

> শ্রমজীবী ঘাম মাখা দেহে / তোমারই সন্ধান পাই।
>
> I find you in sweat-stained bodies of the working poor.

A politically and theologically charged statement, it was, in line with Tagore's contemporary effort at Sriniketan to reconstruct the rural society and his firm conviction on the dignity of labour. In the English translation, all this is given up for a reflection on spiritual acceptance: "Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. The labouring

poor are gone, the sweat dried, the political theology is now an abstract mysticism of immanence.

In all five of these poems, Tagore's self-translating approach remains consistent throughout. As Harish Trivedi (1993) remarks, Tagore "self-inscribed" his authorial voice in the "global literary marketplace" (p. 79), and the phrase encapsulates the creative as well as the strategic aspect of his practice. In English versions, politically and socially charged matter is consistently 'blandified' or 'universalised' but not simply at random; it is done as a part of a coherent project to make it acceptable for the Western literary polysystem. Texts are not neutral actors, but agents of negotiation (Even-Zohar, 1990, p. 20), and Tagore's self-translations illustrate this negotiation with remarkable clarity and intelligence.

The five-poems analysis makes it clear that, as a body of works, Tagore's departures from his Bengali counterparts are not haphazard nor mostly concessive. They are aesthetically legible following a logic; the more political or cultural the Bengali poem, the more it re-forms its materials in universalising English. It is not the logic of a writer who did not know English and feared that he was not making a good impression; it is the logic of a bilingual artist who had carefully considered the various functions that poetry can serve in various cultural settings and had made conscious decisions based on his understanding. This is evident in the process of selection. Tagore selected just 103 poems out of several hundred from Bengali writings, and this is as much a statement as any poem in particular. He was manipulating a specific image of his creative vision, that of the literary and spiritual needs of a Western audience at a certain historical moment. To see this curation as an authorial act and not a capitulation to the culture is the key step in a more meaningful consideration of Tagore's contribution to world literature and in a greater appreciation of what it means to be the most personal creative act—writing a poem. It is a very close experience to translating the poem into another language in which one has lived for a lifetime.

Creative Rewriting vs. Authorial Control

Creative rewriting and authorial control are not just two alternatives but instead a dynamic tension that propels the whole project of the English *Gitanjali* in Tagore's practice. There was an obvious editorial control exercised by Tagore in selecting the poems. The English collection is not just from the 1910 *Gitanjali*; there are several Bengali collections from which it has been picked. He also chose to portray his spiritual universe in Bengali and to deal with that audience's reception of his work, which was not originally written in Bengali. At the same time, though, the exercise of control was an exercise of creativity, as the decisions to include, omit, expand and shift all created a text that was meaningfully different from the source.

The omissions are of special significance. Tagore has often erased culturally specific Bengali elements such as references to specific rivers, locations, seasonal cycles, devotional practices, etc. He substituted them with a conscious lack of precision in the sense of universality. The Bengali poem, loaded with cultural significance, evokes the river Padma, while the English translation turns it into a river without a name or limit, a symbol of spiritual quest instead of a geographical place. This was criticised by Amiya Chakravarty, who stated that Tagore "removed from the rooted symbol of Bengal the sensuous vitality of the poems" (1961, p. 76). In a register of criticism, this is fair, but in another register, it is not, as Paul Ricoeur (2006) points out, because translation can allow the text to be "linguistically hospitable" (p. 10), thus creating a space in which the text is more accessible to the new reader. From this point of view, absence isn't simply the loss of something. It's an invitation, too.

The opposite of expansion is contraction. In a few instances, Tagore expanded the Bengali sentences or phrases into English with sentences or phrases of his own, enriching the philosophical message or the length of the meditation. A Bengali poem about the flowers blooming in the spring turns into a longer meditation on rebirth and the circularity of time in English. Berman (1992) describes translation as "the deployment of meaning in another space rather than the transportation of a message" (p. 13), and Tagore's expansions are a perfect example of such deployment, thereby

opening his poems to a space where the transcendental imagery and Biblical rhythms would strike home with the targeted audience.

The third of the major operations is re-contextualisation. The Bengali *Gitanjali* was set out in an abundant intertextual setting, and its readers would have recognised the influence of the Vaishnava kirtan tradition, the Bengali Renaissance and Tagore's ties with the social reform movement of his time. In the preface to his English *Gitanjali*, Yeats foregrounded spiritual yearning as the universal message of the Bengali poems and offered it to the Western reader as an introduction to a devotional wisdom text. This construction is made possible by Tagore's own translations. His use of Lord and God instead of the more complex Bangla spiritual vocabulary, his use of the cadences of the King James Bible, were not just about his adjustment to foreign demands but his active contribution to the construction of his own reception.

Because of Lawrence Venuti's observation that "translation is always an act of violence upon the text" (2008, p. 20), the violence is self-directed toward self-translation. The political urgency of the Bengali, a prayer for national renewal in the colonial period, has shifted into a universal moral vision, with much less political content when translated into English. It is helpful here to draw on the idea of "translation of culture" (1994, p. 224) as developed by Homi Bhabha, where language and text don't simply cross borders, but become new cultural citizens. The English *Gitanjali* was born an alien to the Bengali Republic. In a world republic of letters (Casanova, 2004, p. 14), cosmopolitan qualifications were more valued than the local ones.

The Nobel Prize in 1913 established a "double displacement" as Trivedi (1993) puts it (p. 59); Tagore was known internationally for his mystical poetry, while his massive output of poetry, drama, fiction, essays, and songs was largely overlooked by the West. The self-translation, then, is empowered and constrained. It provided Tagore with a worldwide platform which no Indian writer had ever been granted, and it also immobilised his international image in the interpretation that the English *Gitanjali* had established. This paradox of "not being seen" through "selective self-presentation",

Bhabha (1994) would note, is not "accidental" or "translatable", but a characteristic of postcolonial "hybridity".

But to dismiss Tagore as merely accommodating to Western demands would be a mistake. His own translation not only did not empower others to translate him, but it conferred some agency upon him in the process. He chose what the western reader could see and what he couldn't–he maintained the image but not the Bengali originals. There is an imaginative space created by the translator: "the translator writes between two texts, inventing a place that did not exist before" (Derrida, 1985, p. 188). This is the creative space that Tagore occupied: the bilingual poetic space between two literary systems where he could engage the demands of both systems on his own terms, with his own intelligence, in his own voice.

In the case of self-translation, Roland Barthes's "death of the author" (1977, p. 148) paradoxically doubles: Tagore is both the author who has lost his original self in the process of transposing it to language and the translator who brings it back to life in another language. He was a self-translator, singular and double, author and re-author. Ultimately, the Bengali and English *Gitanjali* are compared, and it is seen that these two impulses, creativity and control, are not antagonistic, but rather in a productive interdependence. Control is the key to creativity, and creativity is the application of control. They compose what is best named second writing, bilingual writing, which creates a new literary object instead of a copy of an already existing one.

Implications for Literary and Translation Studies

The self-translation by Tagore has implications and connotations that go beyond *Gitanjali* to the theoretical issues which are currently being broached in the field of translation studies. There are three areas that warrant special mention. They are reconceptualisations of authorship, repurposing of the concept of translation as process, and the particular needs of postcolonial literary analysis.

Authoring as Tagore's bilingual practice suggests that any model which places the determination of authorial intention in a single and stable source text is problematic. What is an Author (Michel

Foucault)? However, Tagore shows the discursive variable nature of the author-function, rather than, as (1977) suggests, one essential trait of a person. He performed two different author-functions, Bengali poet and English poet, at once and in a single creative project, as a writer-translator. It is impossible to mark any hierarchy between the Bengali and English *Gitanjali* in the sense of which is original and which is a copy; as this paper has suggested all along, they are both manifestations of the same creative impulse, each with a different audience, a different literary norm and a different set of cultural demands.

In terms of translation studies, Tagore's case challenges the ongoing binary oppositions between faithfulness and treachery, and domestication and foreignisation. The practice of trying to leave the translator's voice out of translations, in favour of fluent readability, is criticised by Lawrence Venuti (2008) as the "translator's invisibility" (p. 21). By hyper-visible translation, the translator is made visible, and every deviation from the Bengali can be directly attributed to the decision-making process of the author, and the visibility is itself theoretically significant. It shows that translation is not a clear path between texts, but a place of rewriting, influenced by systemic, cultural and ideological considerations. This is the same argument as Lefevere (1992) constructed in another way. That is the argument Tagore puts into vivid historical form in his practice.

Perhaps the most significant of the postcolonial aspects for the field is the idea of "postcoloniality. The concept of "postcoloniality" is perhaps the most significant of the postcolonial aspects for the field. The translation from one's own into English in an asymmetrical linguistic economy of colonial India was never a neutral process. In colonial settings, Niranjana (1992) situates translation as a "strategy of cultural survival" (p. 3), thereby making one's voice heard in international discourse. While Tagore's self-translation preserved some agency which was lacking in those translated by colonial intermediaries, it cost him some. It was about adjusting to the very system that cultural norms formed the expectation of the East having to interact with the West. But, according to Casanova (2004), peripheral writers are able to gain international recognition by adapting to the aesthetic norms of

dominant literary centres p. 14) and in the creative intelligence with which they do it. *Gitanjali* is a study in conformity and in the creative intelligence it played with.

The impact on multilingual literary creativity is also great. Tagore's case reinforces the English *Gitanjali* model proposed by Grosjean (2010), which holds that the English version is not the Bengali version with its cultural-specificity but an entirely new version based on the same poetic materials, facilitated by a bilingual consciousness in which a person can inhabit both languages at the same time. This is especially important in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) dialogic: the notion that no single voice or discourse is ever isolated from another, but is always engaged in some kind of relation with it. The present aspect of Tagore's English poems is bilingual, but they also have the Bengali original as an underlying parallel, which influences not only the way in which he writes in English but also what he leaves unspoken.

Tagore's case calls for close consideration of reception as an integral part of what translation is and does in studies of translation methodology. While the Bengali *Gitanjali* is a part of its cultural world, the English translation has been the channel of Tagore's international legacy. Translations have their own lives and are sometimes more influential than the texts that are translated (Bassnett, 2014, p. 47). The paradox, which is that the translated text sometimes becomes more readable than the original one in the world literature market, is not an exception, but one of the basic elements of the circulation of world literature, and Tagore's *Gitanjali* is one of the most instructive and significant examples.

There's one more implication that should be noted. This is a moral aspect of self-translation practice. Translation was not merely a linguistic operation for Tagore, but a process of decisions regarding the process of representation: which parts of Bengali cultural and spiritual life were translatable, which were hidden, distorted or simply lost in the translation? Those choices meant real-world consequences for the perception of Bengal and India outside of their borders. The burden of responsibility on the self-translator is therefore different from and greater than that of the external

translator, who may always point to the "limitations of his access to the source culture. This was not the case with Tagore. Because of his authority over his own texts, when he omits, simplifies or reframes, his choice is irrevocable, not so when the same action is undertaken by an external translator. Instructive here is Emily Apter's (2013) research into untranslatability, that is, the pressure to make texts universally accessible that regularly renders the irreducibly particular – the elements of a text that refuse any crossing, that demand their own linguistic and cultural particularity. This silencing is consistently shown and done in Tagore's self-translation, and to retrieve the silenced original is an imperative question for Tagore scholarship. The ever-increasing number of retranslations of the Bengali *Gitanjali* by Radice, Ketaki Kushari Dyson, and others reflects and mirrors exactly this recovery, and the many critical studies appearing about the Bengali *Gitanjali* demonstrate a more dialectical awareness of the self-translated and the original work in the field.

Conclusion

The *Gitanjali* of Tagore is a test case of some of the most basic questions of modern literary and translation studies. Based on the comparative reading of five poems in Bengali and English languages in this paper, it can be concluded that Tagore neither copied nor betrayed his Bengali originals but rather made a transformation through a repertoire of consistent and purposeful operations, such as omission, expansion and re-contextualisation, that results in a companion work rather than a copy. It was the focal point of the Western literary polysystem, changed the world picture of Indian literature and won Tagore a Nobel Prize. It also, at the same time, narrowed his international image to that of mystical universalism, obliterating the political, philosophical and formal diversity of his Bengali prose.

The ambivalence of these outcomes is an intrinsic paradox to postcolonial self-translation. The accommodation of translation into the language of the coloniser brings visibility, but at the cost of accommodation; Tagore accommodated well, but he could not get rid of it completely. Tagore's bilingual state is very well captured by

Bhabha's (1994) observation that it is a "location of negotiation characterised by tension and ambivalence rather than neutral mixing" (p. 112). He was by no means a Bengali poet in English but a hybrid agent, existing in a complex cross-over between two literary cultures.

Finally, this study suggests that Tagore's self-translation can be read as a generative bilingual process, rather than a reproduction process, which created something new instead of a copy of an original piece. The English *Gitanjali* is distinctive not only in its aesthetic unity but also in the way it has been read and its literary origins. If it is looked upon just as a translation of the Bengali original, nothing can be more wrong. More, because it resonates in English words that Bengali did not look for; less, because it is always a loss of the cultural density and political weight of the source. This irretrievable duality is not a defect in the translation act, but a state of literary existence. It is the condition that makes world literature possible, and it is one of the best means of self-translation.

The practice of Tagore also has an immediate future aspect, which has grown even more acute these days compared to the century since the appearance of the English *Gitanjali*. In the context of the ongoing expansion in global literary culture and the increasing diversity of literary forms, problems of text control and the terms of text transfer between languages are becoming ever more central to debates on representation, equity and aesthetic value. As recent scholarship by Hokenson and Munson, by Grutman, by Munson's unknown friend Nerlekar, and by Bassnett herself makes clear, the idea of authorship and translation, and the implications of what it means to be creative in an era when it is neither exclusively Greek nor exclusively Russian, is in a state of flux and under extended discussion in the field. Tagore is at its very beginning, and someone who adapted with great intelligence and at a great cost to two languages and two literary systems, producing two sets of works which still resonate with readers everywhere. The meaning of his bilingual accomplishment will only be made plain when both texts are read in authentic dialogue; when one does not presuppose the other; when one does not merely articulate the other. This is the dialogical reading that this paper has tried to initiate, and it is the

reading that is required by Tagore's practice, with all its richness and contradictions.

In the case of Tagore, Susan Bassnett (2014, p. 47) observes that "translation is not a secondary activity but a primary shaping force in the construction of literature", which finds particularly strong support in the case of Tagore. Today, his example is a teacher and a lesson in itself. Books keep moving across the borders of languages; self-translation reminds one that movement from one language to another is never just a technical process. It is also creative, political, and irreducibly human at all times.

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