Practices, Constructions and Deconstructions of “World Literature” and “Indian Literature” from the PEN All-India Centre to Arvind Krishna Mehrotra

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Abstract

This essay explores two different ways by which ideas and “problems” of the “world,” “India,” “Indian literature,” and “world literature” were experienced, discussed, translated, imagined and remade in specific spaces like Bombay or journals such as *The Indian PEN*. I focus on one relatively formalized organization, the PEN All-India Centre, which was founded in Bombay in 1933 as the Indian branch of International PEN, and on a contemporary poet, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, and the informal network of writers and artists close to him. Through the widely different agendas, practices, concerns, contexts and forms of writer collectivization which I outline in this essay, the PEN All-India Centre in the 1940s and 1950s, and the Bombay poets of the 1960s did try to eat the corners of the world and of world literature away. They aimed to break on the world stage, reclaimed an “India” that included what was non-Indian, and put forward, through translation and a cut-and-paste “collation” of the world and world literature, an idea of internationalism and interconnectedness where provincialism was the enemy. By discussing the situated, critical, and imaginative processes of reworlding that were at stake, and the struggles they gave rise to in the case of the PEN All-India Centre, I explore how these writers also put forward defiant practices of cosmopolitanism that reallocated the Eastern and the Western, the peripheral and the significant.

Keywords

world literature – Indian literature – India – PEN All-India Centre – Arvind Krishna Mehrotra – internationalism – cosmopolitanism – translation – Bombay

In this essay I explore two different, and at times opposite, ways by which ideas of the "world," "India," "Indian literature" and "world literature," have been constructed and reinvented. I will focus first on an organization, the PEN All-India Centre, which was founded in Bombay in 1933 as the Indian branch of International PEN ("a world association of poets-playwrights-editors") by the Columbian-born theosophist Sophia Wadia. Its publications from the 1930s up to the 1950s are fascinating documents in which ideals of "Indian literature" and "world literature," and of "India" and the "world," appear both as highly interconnected constructs and as formidable challenges.

I also examine the practice and networks of a contemporary Indian writer, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, who writes in English but translates from Hindi and other Indian languages, lives in Allahabad and Dehradun, places he has known since childhood and of which he has said that they are the only places he can write from and about. Like other writers of his generation or the next (I am thinking for instance of Arun Kolatkar, Adil Jussawalla or Amit Chaudhuri), Mehrotra has shied away from totalities like "India" or the "world" and challenged the compact certainty of "location," "belonging," "Indianness" or "Indian Literature."¹ Yet his preoccupation – as a poet and translator, as a critic and anthologist² – has always been with the geography of letters, and the location of literature, if "location" is understood, following James Clifford, as an "itinerary rather than a bounded site – a series of encounters and translations" (11) and as history. Mehrotra's interest lies in the "invisible web of connections that lies beneath a literature, the stories that are hidden behind the stories we read." It is motivated "less by a desire to interpret the pattern in the carpet than to understand how it came to acquire the shape it did" (*Partial Recall* 1). Hence this geography is moving, multiple and acutely singular, both in the sense of distinctiveness and of inventiveness, since Mehrotra constantly redraws the cartography of letters as well as his own place in it. He also exposes the multi-lingual web of unpredictable affiliations and lineages that he and other writers of his generation created for themselves, the multiple worlds that writers and works of literature always simultaneously inhabit *and* invent.

Through widely contrasting agendas which I outline in the course of this essay, there is a common thread that runs from the PEN All-India Centre to Mehrotra and the informal literary fraternity to which he belonged: in both

1 "I've never stopped to ask myself whether I am an Indian poet or not ... What makes you Indian should really take care of itself" acknowledged Kolatkar (de Souza 20), while in a recent interview Mehrotra has made the following claim: "to be very honest, I don't feel like an Indian at all. I don't know what an Indian is" ("No Idea").

2 "To edit an anthology is an opportunity to revise the literary map" (Mehrotra *Oxford India* 8).

cases, “Indian literature”³ and “world literature,” as well as the cartographies of “India” and the “world,” are *born in* translation. Pheng Cheah has proposed that the “world” be understood as a “dynamic process of becoming, something continually made and remade rather than a spatial-geographical entity” (30–31). As I argue below, the *PEN* example shows that “India” must also be understood in those terms. What’s more, in both cases, the power of translation is premised on its ability to integrate or interconnect, and by joining together distant corners of the world, it contributes to reinventing given cartographies. That is what the poet Adil Jussawalla suggests in an article entitled “Who is my Neighbour,” where he writes that you can choose your neighbours wherever you see fit because the transcontinental lines of translation, like an atlas of international air roots, have the power to forge such direct lines, open routes and passages (*Maps* 72–73).

On the one hand, literature aims at constructing a “union” called “India,” and helps re-map the world by redressing the asymmetric recognition of nations and national literatures across the world. That was one of the aims of *PEN*, at a time – the 1930s and 1940s – when, as Rosemary Maranguly George has convincingly argued, “India” was still a goal or vision rather than an established entity, and the “laborious task of constituting a nation called India” partly fell on “Indian literature” (17). For Mehrotra and other writers of his generation, on the other hand, if literature also contributes to remap the world, this is done “with a pirate rather than a cartographer’s regard for accuracy” (Kolatar *Kala Ghoda* 16) that aims at defamiliarizing India, not at constructing it.

How are world literature and Indian literature diversely produced, discussed, translated and imagined in locations such as Bombay, Allahabad or Dehradun and in the specific spaces of journals such as *The Indian PEN*⁴ (henceforth *TIP*) in the 1930s and 1940s, or in Mehrotra’s little magazines in the 1960s? How are “India” and the “world” made and remade through the consumption and practice of translation? And what situated, critical, imaginative processes of “worlding” – a term which Rob Wilson, drawing on Spivak, defines as an active-force gerund turning “nouns (world) to verbs (worlding), thus

3 See Aijaz Ahmad’s authoritative essay “Indian Literature, Notes Towards the Definition of a Category” on the problematic nature of the category conventionally identified as “Indian Literature.” In the inaugural address to the Third All-India Writers’ Conference in 1954, Nehru himself referred cautiously to this “something which may be termed Indian literature” (*The Indian Pen* November 1954 3).

4 The whole run of *The Indian PEN* from the 1930s up to the 1990s, as well as reports of the organization, committee minutes, conference proceedings and other documents are locked away in a large room of the Theosophy Hall Building in Mumbai. I thank Ranjit Hoskote for giving me access to the building and to these archives.

shifting the taken-for-granted and normal life-forms of the market and war into the to-be-generated and remade" (212) – are at stake?

1 "The problem of the world is, on a smaller scale, that of India also" (1937)

International PEN, whose Charter pledges to champion the "ideal of *one* humanity living in peace in *one* world" (my emphasis) and whose first article states that "literature, national though it be in origin, knows no frontiers,"⁵ was premised both on the universality of literature and its agency, that is on the belief that the international circulation of literature and the promotion of mutual understanding between world writers would serve the cause of international peace. The Indian branch of PEN was premised on the same ideals. In the 1930s, when the world was also on the brink of disaster, many pages of *The Indian PEN* give evidence of this great faith in literature: "the writers of a country wield greater power than its lawmakers ... our PEN organisation is an instrument better fitted to achieve where the League of Nations has failed" (*TIP* August 1936 np). PEN in India was also concerned with ideas of the "world" and "world literature" from the very start. In the January 1939 issue of the journal for instance, excerpts from the preface Maxim Gorky wrote for "The Catalogue of the Publications of World Literature" in 1919 are reprinted from the April 1938 issue of the Russian journal *International Literature* (Moscow). Yet the "world" (often capitalized as "World") is coupled obsessively with "India," and "world literature" symmetrically correlated with "Indian literature."

In the first two or three decades of its existence, the PEN All-India Centre described itself time and again as a link, a bridge, a liaison. Its avowed aim was to work towards the unification of the world and the unification of India, to bridge lines of cleavage between Indian literatures, and between India and the rest of the world. This dual agenda was always a translational one. From its inception, the organization put extraordinary faith in translation both as a means of nation-building, to promote and construct what it termed the "fundamental unity" that underlies all Indian literatures, and as a means to bridge the gap between nations, foster international brotherhood, and reconcile "East" and "West." This goal was premised on a fairly conventional view of what "world literature" was, and often couched in a vocabulary that seemed largely indebted

5 The Charter was printed on the back cover or last page of *The Indian PEN* issues in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

both to Theosophy⁶ and to Orientalism's discursive construction of India.⁷ The idea was to "serve our great, grand, glorious Motherland, *Aryavarta*, the Land of the Nobles ...," by translating Indian literatures ("gems from their masterpieces" offered "on the altar of the Motherland"⁸) into the English language, posited in its banal role of showcasing India's literary wealth to the West and "interpreting" India to the world. But the idea was also to promote unity, knowledge and understanding across India itself, between writers of different languages, by translating regional literatures, and using its monthly organ *The Indian PEN* as "a clearing-house for news of literary developments in all of the country's language areas" (*TIP* February 1937 1).

The PEN example seems at first glance to corroborate many common discourses on "world literature" today. The key unit both for PEN International and for the PEN India Centre remained national literature. As we have seen, the Indian Centre constantly grappled with meta-categories such as "India" and the "World," but also "East" and "West." It also seemed to validate the idea that there is *one* world literary space to which translation, and translation as an index of recognition, can give access. And yet, at the same time, it complicated the map significantly. First, because PEN is premised, at least in principle or in expectation, on the antithesis of the agonistic model highlighted by critics such as Pascale Casanova. An editorial published in 1935 makes the point clearly:

All are welcome, young or old, rich or poor, man or woman ... a national of whatever country ... PEN started in England, so its international headquarters are there, for convenience's sake, but the PEN is no more English than it is French or Dutch, American or Italian. It is for all forward-looking men of letters whose appreciation of literature and of culture does not stop at their national boundaries.

TIP November 1935 np

6 The history and vocabulary of the PEN in India, especially in its first 30 years of existence, are inflected by Sophia Wadia's deep engagement with Theosophy. The points of convergence between PEN and Theosophy, an international organization which was premised on "Universal Brotherhood" and was officially unconcerned about politics though entangled with the nationalist movement in India, would be interesting to explore. The idealism and so-called spiritualism of the All-India PEN Center was in fact condemned by the other important All-India Writers' organization, the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), which was created roughly at the same time as the PEN (its manifesto was published in 1935), but with a clear Communist agenda.

7 In its privileging of spirituality, high culture, and Hindu traditions (See Pollock, Mufti).

8 Sophia Wadia, "Editor's foreword" (In Barua ii).

What is more, the national model was constantly an issue, a problem, a challenge. The PEN All-India Centre thus sharply highlights the difficulties of trying to map the literary field according to a singular framework. Although the consolidation of the nation and the national through that of a national literature was another avowed aim of the Indian Centre, it also undermined, fractured or complicated both the "national," "All-India" framework and the single international "world" system. It did so by testifying to the challenge posed by the extraordinary diversity of "Indian literature," the multiple worlds, institutions, concerns and networks, the *sammelans*, *mushairas*, *parishads*, *sanghas* (festivals, assemblies, associations) that punctuated the life of Indian literatures, *outside* and *alongside* a global literary stage. Hence if the "world" and "India," "Indian literature" and "world literature" are constantly correlated in the pages of *The Indian Pen*, it is also because of their perceived common problematic nature, where diversity constantly runs the risk of jeopardizing unity, and provincialism of deviating into sectarianism. The point is made explicitly in a 1937 article of *The Indian PEN* called "The Language Barrier": "the problem of the world is, on a smaller scale, that of India also" (*TIP* April 1937 32). If Franco Moretti is right to suggest that world literature is not an object but a problem, that is precisely what *The Indian PEN* highlights page after page, while providing a compelling counterpoint to the "problem" of world literature with that of Indian literature.

2 Cosmopolitanism and East-West Exchanges: Claiming Equality and Reciprocity

The different publications of the PEN All-India Centre, especially *The Indian PEN* editorials in the first two or three decades of its existence, testify to the striking confidence of an organization which, for most of its long life, barely included 400 members.⁹ At the Second All-India Writers' conference organized in 1947, Sophia Wadia's words have a defiant tone. Shunning the "worldly point of view" which looks upon the Indian Centre (and by implication upon India) as negligible because of its financial and numerical "insignificance," she claims power, merit and recognition:

9 In the 1960s and 1970s, membership did rise up to 700, but it declined afterwards, partly because of the increase of membership fees required by International PEN (the annual membership was Rs 1 in 1933 and Rs 12 in 1964, but International PEN required Rs 100 in 1981).

If we were asked to define what we are as an All-India Centre of the P.E.N., we might call ourselves an embryonic but a vital and integral part of the dream which we all share, the dream of a World Community ... Numerically we are small, we are insignificant ... Financially, we are poor and therefore we are insignificant from the worldly point of view. We are therefore, unknown and unrecognized. But, friends, we do not feel small or weak; we are powerful and we want to use our might and power for good only.

TIP January 1948 3

From an “embryonic” centre in Bombay then, India speaks to the world. The aim is to break onto the world stage and assert India’s “worth” and “eminence” (words abundantly used in the journal) on that stage, on a par with other nations and other literatures. In its “abstract of rules” published in the first issue of *The Indian PEN*, the Centre states that it was created to facilitate both “the international circulation” and the “reciprocal exchange of literary works” (emphasis added, *TIP* March 1934 6). The Centre was also premised on the need to redress a double imbalance: the invisibility of India as a whole, and the invisibility of Indian literatures not written in English more specifically. The first issue of *The Indian PEN* opens on the editorial “Why a P.E.N. Club in India?”:

Why not? Are Indian writers not good enough to take their place in the fellowship of the world’s creative minds? ... Those who write in English ... may know each other and the world may know them; but how many among the *littérateurs* of different vernaculars know each other? More important, what does the world know of their works?

TIP March 1934 1

PEN in India thus also aimed at redressing the asymmetric exchange of world literature and world knowledge. A short note published in a 1939 issue of *The Indian PEN* refers to an article written by a certain “B.B.” who had expressed his mixed feelings on the award of the Nobel Prize for literature to Pearl Buck: “for certain Indian writers of today are certainly as good as, and even much better than, Pearl Buck ... but difficulties of translation, publication and propaganda ... stand in the way” (*TIP* January 1939 11). Twenty-five years later, at the 6th P.E.N. All-India Writers’ Conference in Mysore, Mulk Raj Anand (who was both a founding member of the PWA and a member of the PEN) pronounced a more bitter diagnosis in a vehement speech entitled “East-West Dialogue.” The much-needed exchange of literary works in the world through translation has

been "thwarted" by the domination of the West and the denigration of cultures of the East, and Anand appealed to writers' organisations to devise and extend their programs of translation (Ezekiel 112–13). Although Anand's address needs to be viewed in the light of another context and a different internationalist lineage – the Afro-Asian Writers' Conferences and the Non-aligned Movement – we find the same claim to political and cultural self-assertion and to a more balanced literary world order.

If India, through the PEN, aimed to speak to the world, "India" was also able to meet the "world" in a series of distinct spaces produced by the organization. During the PEN International Congresses held each year in a different country,¹⁰ international delegates met in person. Foreign writers and International PEN members were also welcomed at the PEN offices in Bombay, where they were often invited to give talks, lectures or readings.¹¹ At the same Bombay offices, books, journals, bulletins, and letters from all over India and the world were sent. What's more, *The Indian PEN*, however slight (it barely included twenty pages and often seemed closer to a newsletter than a journal), circulated internationally, and was sent to all Centres of the PEN throughout the world. As I highlight below, its pages were also filled with lectures, journal excerpts and news of the world, and with speeches given by famous writers at different PEN meetings or Congresses.

Pheng Cheah has argued that since one cannot see the world, the cosmopolitanism optic, which is about viewing oneself in a circle of belonging that "transcends the limited ties of kinship and country," is not one of perceptual experience but of the imagination: "world literature is an important aspect of cosmopolitanism because it is a type of world-making activity that enables us to imagine a world" (26). This view was put forward 70 years earlier by Sophia Wadia, who talked about the friendship of aliens that "knights a man a cosmopolitan." By bringing writers of the world into personal touch, PEN "helps to make conscious of the bonds that link humanity in one great brotherhood." And for those who cannot come into personal contact with foreign writers, she argues, books are "the Open Sesame to other people's lives and hearts" (*TIP* November 1937 92).

10 A PEN International Congress was scheduled to be held in Mysore in 1940 but was cancelled because of World War II. The idea was revived in a different form after the War with the First All-India Writers' conference organized in Jaipur in 1945, where writers from all over India, as well as foreign writers such as Hermon Ould or E.M. Forster and a few American, French and Polish delegates, met.

11 The PEN also published slim annual reports of its activities, where visits of international writers were registered.

Behind the slightly trite formulation, it is important to keep in mind that cosmopolitanism was also an urgent project at the time, and in many ways a condition of survival. If, in the 1930s and 1940s, when the struggle for India's independence coincided with the Second World War, the problem of India was the problem of the world, it was because the violence bred by a "poisonous provincialism" (the words used by Gandhi in an article from *Harijan*, excerpts of which were reprinted in the September 1939 issue of *TIP*) threatened to engulf India and the world. Commenting on a speech made by Sarojini Naidu in Hyderabad in which she urged writers of various Indian languages not to succumb to "narrow self-identification with the race, the community, the province, or the linguistic area," Sophia Wadia suggested that Naidu had put her finger on the very crux of India's problem (*TIP* August 1937 np). By disregarding the barriers of race, nation and creed, and by working towards India's and towards the world's unification, PEN's cosmopolitanism could provide a strong "antidote."¹²

Finally, worldliness or cosmopolitanism was also constructed by the inter-textual fabric of *The Indian PEN* which, like other periodicals of the time, was largely made up of notes, summaries and quotations from various Indian, European and American periodicals or newspapers.¹³ References were varied and included journals such as *The Vishwa-Bharati Patrika* and *Kavita* (Bengali), *Hans*, *Ajkal* and *Jeevan Sahitya* (Hindi), *Kumar* (Gujarati), *Aam-Rai* (Sindhi), *Panjabi Sahitya*, *The Leader* (Allahabad), *The Pioneer* (Lucknow), *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, *The Bharat Jyoti* (English, from Bombay), *The Modern Review* (English, from Calcutta), *Triveni* (English, from Madras), *The Times of India*, *Indian Affairs*, *The Bombay Chronicle*, *The Hindu*, *Britain Today*, *Australian Poetry*, *The Dublin Magazine*, and *The New York Times*, as well as PEN magazines or bulletins from all over the world. Interestingly, *The Indian PEN* was less Asian-oriented than the *Modern Review* (see Orsini in this issue), and although a few Soviet or Chinese periodicals were quoted, the focus outside of India was largely western-centric. As I suggest below, it was also oriented towards the present, and gave the impression of a "global simultaneity of literary experience" (Holt 89).

12 A word used in an editorial entitled "The Books of the World:" "In a world where the evil spirit of sectarianism, religious as well as political and racial, has produced enmities, good books can prove strong antidotes" (*TIP* August 1938 np).

13 See Isabel Hofmeyr on Gandhi's *Indian Opinion*. Drawing on Ellen Garvey, who has shown that the "scissors-and-paste journalism" consisting of cuttings, extracts and abridgements was the form par excellence of the imperial periodical, she argues that Gandhi's journal consisted of a "miniature empire" (Hofmeyr 13); see also Orsini in this issue.

3 Showcasing or Reducing Diversity: "the process of building a nation out of diverse elements is an endless one"¹⁴

What the PEN Centre in the first two decades of its existence highlights is also the challenge posed by "India" and "Indian literature" to national and unitary frameworks, the constant tension between the desired unity and the intractable diversity of India's multilingual literary field. Before 1947, constructing a national cultural unity *worthy* of independence was an imperative task and, as suggested earlier, this task partly fell on Indian writers. "A united India needs a talisman; let it be a mosaic for which Indian authors should carve fair stones of Sanskrit, Vernacular and English hues, to be inlaid with care and precision" (*TIP* March 1934 5¹⁵). Called upon as architects and builders of the new nation, their strong literary activity was to give "proof of national virility and force" (*TIP* March 1935 np). Working towards independence was seen as such a paramount mission that some voices actually considered the organization to be superfluous once India had gained independence.¹⁶

And yet, after 1947, Nehru's rallying slogan of "unity in diversity" – which the Sahitya Akademi later adopted to define an Indian literature that was "one, though written in many languages" – was still a vision to construct, consolidate and defend. In the aftermath of partition, "there were very few cartographic certainties associated with nationhood" (George 175) and the nation was still at risk of disintegration. This anxiety, which turned on India's "elusive, enduring, unique essence,"¹⁷ permeated the public sphere, and PEN's questions and tensions in many ways echo those which the nation in the making was grappling with at the time. Countless articles of *The Indian PEN* in the 1940s

14 S. Radhakrishnan, "Inaugural address" (in Ezekiel 4).

15 As Sheldon Pollock and other critics have noted, literature may have produced India as much as India may be said to have produced literature. The idea of India as a single civilizational and national entity was in fact first postulated in the realm of literature in Orientalist and philologist circles (Pollock, Mufti).

16 See the November 1948 editorial of *TIP*.

17 Words used by Carol Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer to define the rhetoric of Nehru's *The Discovery of India* (12). Because Orientalist discourse made it impossible to evolve a postcolonial language of politics in which the essence of Indian unity was not the "master problem," they argue that Hindu nationalism is the avatar of Orientalism in the later colonial and postcolonial periods. The unification of India and Indian culture was also effected by privileging certain traditions over others. Hindutva understands diversity as vulnerability (especially vulnerability towards religious minorities), as the threat of disintegration and fracture.

debate the opportunity of having *one* national language – the “language problem” being one of the most conflictual issues in parliament after India became independent.

In the introduction to the proceedings of the first All-India Conference, which had the “development of Indian literatures as a Uniting Force” as its main theme, the intractable multiplicity of India’s literary field was also considered threatening. If the development of the regional literatures was desirable, steps had to be taken “to see that the avalanching growth of the regional literatures did not by the very process smother and destroy the basic unity of India” (*Indian Writers in Council* 1947 xv). This ambivalence, which touches on the apparent contradictory impulse to both showcase and “tame” India’s diversity, lies at the heart of the organization. It no doubt also explains Sophia Wadia’s ambivalence towards the regional branches of the PEN in India. While both International PEN and Sophia Wadia seemed to agree on the principle of developing PEN across India, Wadia was clearly reluctant to let the regional branches or groups liaise directly or independently with the International PEN. The PEN in Bombay was to remain the only “All-India” “Centre.” This centralizing/unifying bias was in fact corroborated by Sarojini Naidu in one of her speeches: “It is significant that we in India, with our many languages, our many provinces, our many capitals, our various types of literature still believe that we should have one focal centre of the PEN, because we wish to prove the reality of the word ‘unity’” (*TIP* August 1936 38). If India, as diverse as it is, can remain one, then there may be hope for the world. In its union, and in the unification of its provincial literatures, lies India’s message to the world, as Sophia Wadia suggests in the same issue: “to destroy provincialism ... Will a Bengali refuse to appreciate and admire a Tamil novel? Will a Telugu shun a Gujarati epic? Will the essayist from Maharashtra feel jealous of his brother in Sindh?” (*TIP* August 1936 40).

Hence, though the Bombay organization actively promoted India’s regional literatures, especially through its series of “introductions” to Assamese, Bengali, and other literatures published under the name “P.E.N. Books. The Indian Literatures” (*italics mine*), the plural appeared more suspect ten years later.¹⁸

18 These “Introductions” which started with Assamese literature in 1941, included a literary history of the regional literature in question, a presentation on its modern developments, and an anthology of texts. In her foreword to the series, Sophia Wadia explains that the project represented a systematic attempt to “popularise the story of the Indian literatures” (Barua ii).

THE P. E. N. BOOKS	
THE INDIAN LITERATURES	
*1 ASSAMESE	— Shri Birinchi Kumar Barua, M. A., B. L.
*2 BENGALI	— Shri A. S. Ray, I. C. S., and Shrimati Lila Ray.
3 GUJARATI	— Prof. Vijayarai K. Vaidya, B. A., and Prof. Vrajrai M. Desai, M. A.
4 HINDI	— Dr. Ram Kumar Varma, M. A., PH. D.
*5 INDO-ANGLIAN	— Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, M. A., D. LITT.
6 KANNADA	— Prof. V. Sitaramiah, M. A.
7 MAITHILI	— Pandit Amaranatha Jha.
8 MALAYALAM	— Prin. P. Sankaran Nambiyar, M. A., and Shri G. Sankara Kurup.
9 MARATHI	— Prof. M. D. Altekar, M. A.
10 ORIYA	— Shri Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, B. A.
11 PANJABI	— Dr. Mohan Singh, M. A., PH. D., D. LITT.
12 SANSKRIT	— Shri K. Chandrasekharan, M. A., B. L., and Brahmasri V. H. Subramania Sastri.
13 SINHALESE	—
14 TAMIL	— Rao Sahib S. V. Pillai, B. A., B. L., and Shri P. N. Appuswami Aiyar, B. A., B. L.
*15 TELUGU	— Prof. P. T. Raju, PH. D., Sastri.
16 URDU	— Rai Bahadur R. B. Saksena, M. A., LL. B.
* Already published.	

FIGURE 1 Last page of the *Indian Writers in Council* proceedings (Iyengar)

In her address to the Third All-India Writers' Conference in 1954, Sophia Wadia even argued that "regional literatures" cannot exist:

Though we may have regional languages, we cannot have regional literatures ... We have an Indian literature expressed in different languages and if that Indian literature is to be true to the past of our country and to the future we are trying to build for our India, it should not be isolated from the true literature of all other countries.

TIP November 1954 7

As I suggested earlier, the integrity of an indivisible “Indian Literature” had to be tirelessly iterated and safeguarded, because it was key to guarantying national *and* international integration, a place in the world *and* in world literature. Cultural unity is “a categorical imperative for India if our national aspirations are ever realized and India is to claim the role in the modern world to which her mighty past would entitle her” (*TIP* April 1936 np). If the Bombay Centre could correspond to Salman Rushdie’s mythological representation of Bombay as a city where “all-India met what-was-not-India,” his vision of having “all Indias” meet and merge would definitely have been considered heretical at the time.¹⁹

And yet, two regular features of *The Indian PEN* eloquently illustrate the multiple networks, circuits and worlds of “Indian literature” hinted at earlier. One was “From everywhere in India,” which ran until the 1970s and aimed at chronicling literary activities in the various Indian languages. The other was the “Notes” section, which briefly registered literary news from India and the world. Both features, like much of the material published in the journal, consisted of news, notes and information sent by – and solicited from – PEN members.²⁰ In the “From Everywhere in India” feature of the January 1939 issue, for example, you find under “Bengali,” news of the seventh annual session of the “Hindoo Friend’s Union Club Sahitya Sammelan” held in Ranchi for three days following the Deepavali festival; the publication of *Bankim-Pratibha*, a collection of papers read out at the Bankim Chandra Centenary Celebration in Calcutta; under “Gujarati,” news of the broadcasting of two famous plays by the Gujarati poet Nananal and the publication of a study on “The Gujarati Theatre” in *The Modern Review*. Under “Kannada,” the launching by the “Karnataka Sahitya Parishat” of a weekly literary journal, *Kannada Nudi*; under “Sindhi,” the news of the death of a Sindhi scholar in Hyderabad who had compiled the only existing Sindhi dictionary and edited the Sindhi weekly *Jote*; under “Tamil,” the translation of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Indira* into Tamil from the Hindi rendering of the Bengali novel, a ceremony honouring Sri T.S. Kannabiram Pillai under the auspices of the Purasawalkam Bhagavath Kalakshetra Sabha; under “Telugu,” news of a ten-day music festival held at Tiruvaiyur to celebrate the anniversary of a “Scholar-saint,” etc. (see Fig. 2).

19 In Bombay, “all Indias met and merged,” writes Salman Rushdie, and “all-India met what-was-not-India, what came across the black water to flow into our veins” (350).

20 In an issue published in 1937, Sophia Wadia’s tone is pressing, even commanding: “*We want material for notes ... We want translations of suitable essays and poems ... We want book reviews; we want original contributions ... And we want them not only for our next few issues but for twelve issues*” (emphasis added, *TIP* February 1937 1).

Benzali.

An attractive feature of the conference was an exhibition of paintings by notable artists and art-students of Calcutta and Ranchi.

Dr. Probdh Chandra Bagchi of the Calcutta University, who is Joint Honorary Secretary of the Bengal Branch of the P. E. N. India Centre, delivered an interesting lecture on "The Culture of Medicinal India."

Dr. Amar Pd. Das Gupta, Prof. Prabodh Chandra Sen, Prof. Sukumar Bhattacharjya, Dr. Hemendra Kumar Sen, Dr. Prafulla Kumar Mitra and Principal Rabindranarayan Ghosh were among the other lecturers and an illuminating paper on 'Nationality, Language and Culture' was read on behalf of the renowned anthropologist, Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy.

Several original poems were read by their authors and the President on the last day delivered an interesting and thoughtful lecture on "Mrityunjay Vidyakankar, the Father of Bengali Prose".

BRAHMANANDA SEN
Secretary, Hinoo Friends' Union Club,
Sahitya Sammelan.

Sri Subodh Basu, a member of the P. E. N., has written a Bengali book which is, and is not, a novel. It is called *Swaraj* and has, we understand, been highly praised by the Bengali press. Professor Somnath Moitra who reviewed the volume in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* says that:—"Novel or no novel the book is arresting both in conception and execution".

Both in the lighter portions that end so unexpectedly on a tragic note, and in the subsequent chapters where the bereaved husband attempts so pathetically to bridge the gulf that death has created, and continue and perfect the charming idyll it has so cruelly destroyed, the author's touch is always sure, and his language and style sensitively responsive to changes in thought and theme. In the second section there was always the risk of degenerating into maudlin sentimentality. Mr. Iwas has succeeded in depicting the groping of a soul in anguish for some intimation of immortality, with a dignity and sincerity that is admirable.

Under the title *Bankim-Pratibha* (Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Genius) the papers of distinguished Indian writers read at the Bankim Chandra Centenary celebration in Calcutta have been published in Bengali and between the same covers, in English, the great novelist's heretofore unpublished letters on the Hindu religion and his English translation of parts of his novel, *Devi Chandhurani*. The work, which is priced at Rs. 3, is published by the Ranjan Publishing House, Mohan Bagan Row, Calcutta.

What is described in *The Calcutta Municipal*

Gazette (3rd December) as 'an excellent edition of *Kashirāmāda-Mahabharata*' has been published by The Indian Publishing House, 22/1, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta, and is priced at Rs. 7/- . The editor, Kavibhusan Purua Chandra De Ubbhattasagar is said to have consulted no less than nine hundred and forty manuscripts in the preparation of this work which contains copious informative foot-notes as well as a long preface, a biographical sketch of the poet, and over a hundred illustrations.

The reviewer points out that previous successive editors had turned Kashiramdas's *Mahabharata* topsyturvy, so this new edition is necessary and timely.

Gujarati.

Prof. Hiralal Godiwala has a study of "The Gujarati Theatre" in *The Modern Review* for November 1938. Gujarat still suffers, he points out, from

Thakore and Yeshwant Pandya. Professor Godiwala deplors the virtual exclusion of the masses in town or country from the benefits of theatrical productions though several young writers, like Umashankar Joshi, "Sundaram", Indulal Gandhi and Chandravadan C. Mehta have attempted "proletarian plays".

Of the last-named playwright, one of our early members, Professor Godiwala writes:—

The latest is written in many plays. Poet, scholar, teacher (and now a director of programmes on the radio), this young writer has already given proof of remarkable original talent in the direction of writing, acting and producing plays. He has a versatile genius.

He has successfully rendered foreign plays into Gujarati plays that almost seem to spring from the soil—thanks to his mastery over colour and style, his knowledge of dialects. He has written plays that have been produced in India and frequently abroad by the author, and once with an all-writers cast played a kaleid-scopic picture of the life of our railway workers, *Nagra Bete* (The Naked Fagins) depicting the multi-coloured life of our beggars; *Sante-Kooda* ('Hide-and-Seek') dealing with the life of a schoolboy; *Pravara* ('The River') dealing with the school; and *Ramodetru-Dahanu* ('The Top Story') dealing with the life of a village. ...Sgt. Chaudhavan's genius lies in the direction of comedy; and there is something Slavonic about his ways. He has successfully introduced the practice of writing critical prose prefaced to plays and has attempted innovations like introducing the character of the author as a character in his plays. His latest play *Veer Naamad*—written round the life of the famous poet and rebel of nineteenth century Gujarat.

We learn that Sri C. C. Mehta, Director of Gujarati Programmes with the V. U. B., Bombay, has arranged for the broadcasting in the near future

of two famous plays of Nanalal, *Jaya Jayant* and *Shahjahan*.

Hindi-Urdu.

Lovers of Indian literature may congratulate themselves that *Hans*, the Hindi monthly founded by the late Sri Munshi Premchand and now ably conducted by his son, Sri Sripat Rai, has begun its

with its unique ideals is progressing steadily in spite of adverse economic conditions. The number is a representative collection from the many-sided Indian literature derived from different literary sources.

literature, derived from different linguistic areas, with "Prakāśh", a one-act drama by Sri Lalitacharan Goswami, "Panghat", a short story from the Marathi of Sri Waman Chorghode, translated by Sri Machave, and "Parivedana", a short story by Sri Nirmala Mitra. There is a brief life-sketch of the Gujarati writer, Prof. K. T. Shah, by Srimati Lilavati Munshi. Sri Sudarshanji discusses the folk-songs of the United Provinces and their close relationship with the life of the people. Other articles also are very suggestive and interesting and we commend highly the service which *The Hans* is rendering Indian literature in general and Hindi literature in particular.

The *Kalyana Kalpataru* for November contains an interesting essay, "Rama Charita Manasa: A Real Epic in Indian Vernacular" by Sri A. N. Purani. The influence of this work of the great Tulsidas in North India and the United Provinces is very great. Sri Purani contrasts the *Rama Charita Manasa* of Tulsidas with Valmiki's *Ramayana* from which the former differs in many respects. Tulsidas's material was derived from tradition, but not so his style, combining grandeur and grace, which was distinctly his own. Sri Purani concludes that what has been said of Homer's work can be said with real truth of Tulsidas's: "Effort that is effortless, that fashions experience into incorruptible song."

Sri Anand Kumar, the son of Pandit Ram Naresh Tripathi, is the author of *Samaj and Other Essays*, published by the Hindi Mandir, Allahabad, and priced at Rs. 12/-. The reviewer in *The Hindu* remarks that "the author commands a simple style, as vigorous as it is felicitous, and the pieces in the book are marked by a width of outlook that is noteworthy." In one essay, "Kavita", Sri Kumar deplores the dearth of poetry in the modern age and attributes it to the growing materialism which is blighting all that is beautiful and artistic.

The Hindi Mandir, Allahabad, has recently brought out also a collection of short poems by the same author, *Pushpa Bana*, which is priced at As. 8/-.

Pandit Nadella Purushotham Sastri of Masulipatnam, who died recently, was a well-known poet and scholar the author of about a hundred works.

scholar, the author of about a hundred works, some thirty of them in Hindi and many in Telugu. One of his well known works was *Adbhutottara Ramayanam*.

Under the title *Udan*, Bhikṣu Jagdish Kashyap has translated from the Pali into Hindi a collection of sayings of the Buddha. It is published by the Mahabodhi Sabha, Saranath, Benares, and priced at Re. 1/6.

Kannada.

Our November issue referred to the launching by the Karnataka Sahitya Parishat of a weekly literary journal, *Kannada Nudi*, under the editorship of Sri A. N. Mahalingam. Dr. G. S. Srinivasiah has been

A. N. Krishna Rao. The first few numbers of *Kannada Nudi* have contained many items of interest, several of which have been contributed by members of our P. E. N. Thus Prof. B. M.

Srikantha, the Vice-President of the Parishat, has been contributing a series of articles on the Classics with a view to making the general public appreciate

their imperishable charm and worth. The first number contains an article on the Rashtracuta

FIGURE 2 “From Everywhere in India” feature (*TIP* January 1939 12–13)

Until 1953, when news of the world and news from India were separated, the "Notes" section of the journal compiled a non-hierarchical inventory or cosmopolitan collage of sorts of contemporary local, regional, national and international news. Although many of these circuits and networks never intersected, and were most often oblivious of each other, all these news jostling against each other appear not only absolutely simultaneous, but equal to one another. Between accounts of a "Bombay Marathi Literary Conference" and a "Kannada Literary Meet," the "Notes" section of the February 1937 issue for instance includes a collection of Urdu poems published by the Jamia-Millia Press in Delhi; a new Bengali literary monthly, *Arti*, launched from Calcutta; an exhibition of books in Malayalam and Sanskrit organized in Trivandrum; an exhibition of the "German Library of Burned Books" off the Boulevard Saint-Germain in Paris; the receipt of the second issue of the Brazilian Pen Club's bulletin in Portuguese; the death of the Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno; the announcement of the Fourteenth annual Conference of the Prabasi Bangal Sahitya Sammelan ("Bengali Writers Outside Bengal") at Ranchi; the new editorial policy of the Hindi monthly *Hans*, etc.

Hierarchy, however, comes back with a vengeance in many early articles, which also bear witness to the elitism of the organization. It is here crucial to

remember that most PEN members in India were from upper caste and upper class backgrounds, and that the successive presidents or vice-presidents of the PEN in India (Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, S. Radhakrishnan, Jawaharlal Nehru, etc.) all belonged to an exclusive circle of national political leaders.²¹ If, as one editorial suggests, the International PEN Club stood pre-eminently for the “ideal of world neighbourliness” (*TIP* July 1936 np), this neighbourliness was also highly privileged, and highly discriminative.

In an editorial titled “Literary Standards,” Sophia Wadia complained of the “ever-swelling flood of cheap and trashy writing,” and argued that “with printing establishments jostling for elbow-room, the world is deluged with poems, stories, books. No wonder that the occasional literary gem among them is all too often overlooked, a diamond buried in a heap of sand” (*TIP* January 1937 np). The casteist bias of the organization (and the violent discrimination behind it) is manifest in another striking editorial (“The Dharma of the PEN”), in which Sophia Wadia used the metaphor of the Varna system to hierarchize literatures. On the lowest plane, “those who pander to a debased public taste and poison the wells of thought” are “the true pariahs, moral scavengers, deserving ostracism from the fraternity of letters” (*TIP* May 1936 np). If in Wadia’s mind this “poisoning” also meant the poisoning of brotherhood by sectarianism, profusion and eclecticism are here again seen as threatening, and must be restrained or monitored. An extremely exclusive view of “true,” “high,” and “pure” literature is obviously put forward, where “trashy” or “debased” writing can mean anything from obscene or commercial to demotic or popular.

4 Nomads: Reading and Writing as Poaching

Writers like Arvind Krishna Mehrotra or Arun Kolatkar, to whom I now turn, take the exact opposite stance. Voracious readers of world and Indian literatures in translation, and translators themselves from pre-colonial literatures in the vernaculars, they belonged to an anti-establishment and anti-commercial “little magazine” fraternity of poets who represented – and to a certain extent

21 All were regular speakers at the All-India Writers’ Conferences. The elitism of the organization is obvious in Iyengar’s account of the events organized around the first All-India Writers’ Conference in Jaipur in 1947. This “republic of letters” and the cosmopolitanism it tried to foster were clearly not “from below”: “At the Maharaja’s party, at the Prime Minister’s party, and again at the party given by Mr. Kamani, one of the leading industrialists of Jaipur, the delegates breathed a friendly and genial air ... Writers from Bengal and Karnataka, ... writers in English and writers in the modern Indian languages, old and young writers, Hindu and Muslim writers ... all had a feeling of kinship” (*Indian Writers* xiii).

cultivated – a form of institutional marginality that rejected assumptions of literary idealism, and opposed the view of art, literature, or language as exclusive, national or formalized domains. When Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, who in the 1960s was an ardent reader of the Surrealists and the Beats, acknowledges that he drew at the time on the spirit of the anti-national poem, he could well be speaking for many of his contemporaries: "‘Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb’ Ginsberg says in ‘America.’ Now if an American poet could say this of America and its bomb, I could certainly say it of India" (Zecchini "We were like cartographers" 194).

Yet, as I have written elsewhere, in relation to the little magazines of the time, the marginality or eccentricity of these writers and artists, was everything *but* provincial ("Translation"). They used everything at their disposal and revelled in the multiplicity of traditions, languages, spaces, temporalities and lineages that made them who they were. This is for instance what the painter and Gujarati poet Gulammohammed Sheikh suggests in a remarkable text titled "Among Several Cultures and Times": "The multiplicity and simultaneity of these worlds filled me with a sense of being part of them all. Attempts to define the experience in singular terms have left me uneasy and restless. [...] It was a multiverse of sorts. And I decided to use it all" (108, 116).

Constantly pushing the frontiers of what is acceptable literature, literary language, or literary standards, many of these writers and artists seem to have viewed themselves as indiscriminate literary gluttons, ragpickers, pirates, or "poachers" in Michel de Certeau's sense of the term. In a chapter entitled "Reading as Poaching," he suggests that readers are like nomads or travellers "poaching their way across fields they did not write," producing "gardens that miniaturize and collate a world" (173–74). In the case of Kolatkar and Mehrotra, the collation is sometimes literal, since a lot of their art is constructed like an assemblage of quotations that are cut, recycled, poached from different traditions, and that testify both to the plurality of the worlds they belong to and to their inclusive view of literature. Kolatkar, for instance, writes poems "stolen / salvaged / plundered from rubbish heap / junkyard / graveyard" (349). Blurring the line between art, junk and found objects, newspapers, poems and songs, he had (like Sheikh) huge folders and scrapbooks where he collected hundreds of articles and clippings from which many of his poems sprung. "I read what literature litter brings me," also writes Adil Jussawalla, who acknowledges that his best reading has been "literally picked off the streets," from booksellers on the footpaths of Bombay (*I Dreamt* 326).

So what we find is a delight in "world literature" as indiscriminate, non-canonical and non-hierarchical material (including material from popular and public culture) to poach, excerpt, steal, assemble, play with, recycle, and make

one's own. "I want to reclaim everything I consider my tradition. It's a browser's approach, not a scholarly one – one big supermarket position," Kolatkar has claimed defiantly (in de Souza 19).²²

Here is where Amit Chaudhuri's comment about the benjaminian lineage of modern Indian writing is so perceptive, which means not only consigning "history to the scrap-yard," but "bringing the scrap-yard into history" and into poetry (*Clearing* 234). In this case, if "Indian literature" is to be defined or situated, it is in that Benjaminian lineage of a world "scrap-yard," somewhat like Kolatkar's poem "Poor man," which was born from a paper distributed by a beggar on an Indian railway platform: "i'm a poor man from a poor land / and everything about me is wrong" (*Collected Poems* 294). But this "poor man," the paper he distributes, and the song he sings, just like Kolatkar's mock-heroic "found" or "scrap" poem, is immediately placed on the world map and makes fun of habitual hierarchies and asymmetries:

i'm a poor man from a poor land and i play a poor guitar
but don't you think i have the right to be a superstar (...)

i'm a poor man from a poor land and i know it makes no sense at all
but i want a villa in the south of france and i want a gold disk on my wall

Many of the short-lived, anti-commercial, cyclostyled or mimeographed "little" magazines of the 1960s and 1970s in which poets and artists of the time bypassed all middlemen and gatekeepers of literature, clearing a space for themselves collectively and transnationally, bear witness to such indiscriminate underground ethos. Frequently published on the cheapest paper, and disregarding conventional rules of grammar, punctuation or typography, they abolished the frontiers between "high" and "low", and often seemed to champion the view that anyone can become a writer and any doodle can become art. They also (that was specifically the case, for instance, of the Baroda-based little magazine *Vrishchik*) spearheaded the struggle against various national literary and artistic academies, state bodies and other instances of "consecration".²³ It was finally in the spaces of many of these handcrafted journals that world literatures and Indian literatures in translation were published.

22 Drawing from Michel de Certeau, I have discussed these tropes of recycling, collage and bricolage in an earlier article (Zecchini "Penser").

23 In "The literary field," Bourdieu writes of the power of consecration held by certain groups, institutions and authorities (including what he calls the "Pen clubs") that aim at defining, codifying and policing literary legitimacy.

5 Translation and the Shifting Ground of Location

The ingurgitation or scavenging of world material through translation shapes the craft, language and locations of these writers. The multiple and *shifting* ground of location and belonging is explicit with Mehrotra. Although from Dehradun and Allahabad, he has considered himself successively and sometimes simultaneously as a "Bombay poet" (a city in which he lived for only two years) and as an American – even Lower East Side – poet. "Literary geographies run counter to real ones. New York and the interior towns of western Maharashtra could be in the same country in neighbouring states. It's the only country worth having patriotic feelings about," he recently declared ("The Writer as Tramp" np)

So if Mehrotra has aimed to become a cartographer of the everyday and a cartographer of the city, if, as he notes himself, "to a poem, the location, whether cultural, historical, geographical or fictive – is everything" (*Partial Recall* 168), and if his poems are often grounded in the "here" of immediate surroundings – the view from a window or a chair, a reflection in the mirror, houses, birds, trees, neighbours, streets, street-sellers or aging mothers –, this location is never a given or a "bounded site." It is recorded with a conscience that combines multiple spaces, temporalities and personas; a place to connect and to defamiliarize with a multiplicity of other places, other literatures, and occasionally other languages. Mehrotra has suggested that even though his subjects have never lived in Europe or the United States, it is the *detour* through these places, and through other voices – including voices of the past, such as Kabir's,²⁴ that has helped him write, and realize that his subjects were nearer home. Mehrotra not only becomes an "Indian poet" thanks to everything he has read and translated, but it is by being an "American poet," and even a "French poet," that he can become an "Indian" one as well:

For me who started writing in the 1960s, the discovery of surrealism helped resolve the awful contradiction between the world I wanted to write about, the world of dentists and chemist shops, and the language, English, I wanted to write in. How do you write about an uncle in a wheelchair in the language of skylarks and nightingales? It's as though I'd said to myself that since I cannot write about these things in English, let me do so in French, so to speak.

MEHROTRA *Collected Poems* xv

24 In that sense, the detour is both spatial and temporal.

In another illuminating essay, Amit Chaudhuri explains that because Mehrotra is “ill at ease with the linear,” he embraces the “spatial, and especially the sideways movement;” and foregrounds a view of literature as “space” rather than inheritance (“The Sideways Movement” np). It is a “space” that one can inhabit the way one wants to, where one can move back and forth, East and West, up, down and sideways, where positions permute, and corners meet. But because that space is, precisely, an *itinerary* rather than a site, it is also a history which must be understood as bricolage rather than inheritance. In this regard as well, Mehrotra’s sense of “location” resembles that of Kolatkar’s, whose Bombay presents itself like a bricolage or assemblage of all the debris and histories of the world. It is also a malleable space, as so many of the *Kala Ghoda Poems* demonstrate: in the “Barefoot Queen of the Crossroads,” the accordion city unfurls like a fan and refolds like the ends of the sari of a young woman drying her hair in the sun; the damp patch on her *choli* is the size of China and its borders that “stretch from her buttocks in the north / to the bend of her knees / in the south / are rapidly shrinking in the sun.” In “A Blind Man Strings a Cot,” the cot becomes a metaphor of the urban tapestry of the city and the world, and the “rope-dancing fingers” of the poet make connections between adjacent sides, “joining south to west, / west to south” (*Kala Ghoda*).

If Mehrotra, Kolatkar, and others seem to move freely in a literary space characterized by interconnectedness, I would however like to highlight three points. First, this interconnectedness or worldliness is never understood only as a process of unification of the world, but as a mode of relation to diversity, and more importantly still, as a mode of relation to marginality – even as the voice of a defiant marginality. Second, this “world literature” often travels through alternative, underground and sometimes accidental circuits, such as those created by the little magazines of the time.²⁵ Third, translation is not an index of recognition, visibility, or “literary value” bestowed by a “centre,” but it becomes a space cleared and imagined by poets who recreate their own non-linear and non-canonical, transnational and transhistorical cartographies, genealogies, and occasionally communities. “Translation participates in

25 These confidential or accidental circuits were not always as random as they seemed to be, however, and were not exclusive of other more institutional or sponsored networks. The ways by which the “Cultural Cold War” informs the transnational and translational circulations in post-colonial India, and the Cold War background (in the context of which the All-India PEN Centre must also be read) behind the modernisms of the 1950s and 1960s is the focus of my current work.

our dream of making out of a historical past a contemporary past, creating of the so-called linear sequential order of history a simultaneous order, an active presence," wrote A.K. Ramanujan (*Collected Essays* 189).

The translations by Mehrotra and some of his contemporaries indeed create a "simultaneous order" or "active presence." I have shown elsewhere (Zecchini *Arun Kolatkar*) that the medieval compositions by Tukaram, Namdev and other *bhakti* poets are renewed through the "poaching" of other literatures, other languages, and through the *Zeitgeist* of the 1960s. Mehrotra reinvents the fifteenth century *bhakti* poet Kabir through a modernist Beatnik lens, and Prakrit poems through his reading of Ezra Pound or William Carlos Williams. In Kolatkar's translations, Tuka speaks in the voice of Charlie Chaplin, Muddy Waters or Allen Ginsberg. These translations offer the most eloquent illustration of Amit Chaudhuri's thoughtful phrase that "In Indian modernity, the Indian and the Western constantly take on each other's disguises" ("A State of Commerce" np). East or West do not just "meet" or are "reconciled," because they do not really exist as prior, stable constructs, because entanglements, permutations and reinventions are at stake, and because these translations defamiliarize or denationalize the familiar.

Regarding the marginal and underground circuits also produced by books and journals being photocopied and passed around – as in Adil Jussawalla's eloquently titled 1991 article "The Joys of Xerox" (included in *Maps* 229–31) – there is a by now legendary story about Mehrotra, who as a teenager started publishing *damn you: a magazine of the arts* after having discovered the existence of Ed Sanders' New York-based *Fuck you: a magazine of the arts* in an issue of *Village Voice* that the uncle of one of his close friends had sent from New York. This is how he began corresponding with the whole American little magazine crowd, with people like Douglas Blazek and Howard McCord, whom he published in his DIY magazines brought out from Allahabad and Bombay. That's also how Indian and American little mags were exchanged, staging their transnational affiliations through their translations, reviews or excerpts of correspondence, while also creating what a literary critic has called a "decentered literary universe" (Bulson), in which texts, writers and translations circulated from periphery to periphery. In Mehrotra's imaginary geography, the United States is "a country just fifty yards down the road, at whose entrance stood not the famous statue but a bright red letter box nailed to a neem tree" (*Partial Recall* 69). New York and the interior towns of Maharashtra or Uttar Pradesh have indeed become neighbouring states.

Kolatkar suggested that a poem is like a "message in a bottle" – which establishes a "strange kind of dialogue" where what you say or write may take a thousand years to reach its reader, and the message is meant for anyone who

finds it, on any shore. Literature can rely on chance encounters, on the *longue durée* of unpredictable genealogies, exhumations and conversations that translation both represents and fosters. In a recent interview, Mehrotra recalls that many Indian poets of his generation were reading Jacques Prévert in the 1960s in the Penguin Books translation done by Laurence Ferlinghetti in 1965. The collection includes a poem called “At the Florist’s,” which describes a man putting a hand in his pocket, and a hand to his heart. Two decades later, a poet from Bombay also wrote a poem around the same motif. “And it’s the same hand, the hand of poetry, which is how poetry travels.” We will never know if Kolatkar had read Prévert’s poem, but something of the French poet reaches him anyway: “the same casual tone, the language stripped bare” (Zecchini “We were like cartographers” 201–2).

6 Conclusion: Eating the Corners of the World Away

“*Damn you* eating the corners of literature” is a line taken from the opening statement of an issue of Mehrotra’s little magazine *damn you: a magazine of the arts* (1967). The writers behind the PEN All-India Centre in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, and the Bombay poets of the 1960s were definitely grounded in different ages, practices, and ethos – the nationalist and institutional elite on the one hand, and the counter-cultural anti-national(ist) modernist conspiracy on the other hand. They also had very different assumptions of what (“world” or “Indian”) literature is – the exclusive circle of literary masterpiece on the one hand, the non-canonical indiscriminate accumulation of everyday material on the other. But while the PEN Center represented a relatively formalized organization, it was also very small, and it relied, to a large extent, just like the loose circle of writers around Mehrotra and Kolatkar, on what Leela Gandhi has called, after Derrida, “the trope of friendship” (2006) and especially on the relations, the networks, and the charisma of two foundational individuals, Sophia Wadia and later Nissim Ezekiel. Despite its elitism then, the PEN in India, whose most important members were also outsiders – one because she was not born an Indian, and the other because of his Jewishness²⁶ – also represented a form a *minor* or marginal consciousness.

Eccentricity and minority are not just predicaments of literary production but conditions of worldliness and cosmopolitanism. In both cases then, these

26 “I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider” famously wrote Ezekiel (“Naipaul’s India” 88).

writers and the communities to which they belonged aimed at eating the corners of the world and of world literature away. They reclaimed an "India" that, albeit in different ways, invited and included what was non-Indian,²⁷ and put forward, through translation and a cut-and-paste "collation" of the world (the notes and news of *The Indian PEN* on one side, the recycled assemblage of a "world scrap-yard" on the other), an idea of worldliness and interconnectedness where provincialism is the enemy!²⁸ Aiming to break free from a form of isolation or insularity, and to break onto the world stage, they aimed at clearing a space for themselves, and at *worlding* the world so that it could also include what was "small," "poor" and "insignificant," to use Sophia Wadia's terms.

Under Mehrotra's pen, however, I have suggested that "eating the corners" of literature means something more than just expanding the map of literature to include so-called geographical peripheries (Bombay, Allahabad or Dehradun), and must not only be connected to the "feverish activity of translation" and "paperback revolution" which Dilip Chitre saw as a defining feature of the post-independence publishing scene: "the world shrank greatly" (*An Anthology* 24). *Damn you* was eating the corners of literature away because these Bombay poets foregrounded a decisively transgressive view of literature, where no spaces, subjects, idioms or "junk" were irrelevant or unacceptable anymore. Corners or margins are cancelled as much as they are bridged. Everything and everyone is included on the literary map.

That brings us back to Gulammohammed Sheikh, whose pictorial work (which he defines as a "world *sangat*" everyone is free to join) provides an apt illustration of the creative spaces many Indian writers and artists inhabit and invent, of their recreated worlds and of the pluralities they contain. In 2003 Sheikh started producing a series of "mappa mundis" from a scanned reproduction of the lost thirteenth-century Ebsorf Mappa Mundi made on parchment, which he recreates as a palimpsest to which he adds, retrieves or incorporates images, fragments, reproductions, and "quotations" collated from different media, stories and traditions across time and space. Images of Kabir and

27 See for instance Sophia Wadia's remark at the 1945 All-India Conference that, "to be Indian in the real sense means and implies being international" (Iyengar *Indian Writers* 200).

28 Like other writers of his generation (Adil Jussawalla, Dilip Chitre, Kiran Nagarkar, Vilas Sarang, etc.) Arvind Krishna Mehrotra has vigorously attacked various forms of nativism that have insulated India's literary cultures from each other and from the rest of the world. In his essay "The Emperor has no Clothes," he draws on Ezra Pound's famous 1917 article "Provincialism the Enemy," where provincialism is defined as an ignorance of people living outside one's village or nation, and a desire to coerce others into uniformity (*Partial Recall* 162).

Majnun, images from Giotto and Lorenzetti are inserted because they are part of his world and his India. It is a world-as-bricolage and a world-as-assemblage that is inseparable from the practice of reading, writing, translating and creating *as* poaching,²⁹ by which the world and one's place in it is being constantly remade, and literature also becomes a space where "East" and "West" are defiantly reallocated.

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29 Certeau, drawing on Levi-Strauss also connects reading to a form of bricolage which read-justs the "residues of previous construction and destruction."

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