The Limited Visibility of the Translator in *The Pleasures of Conquest*

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Introduction

"Some translators are more visible than others," says Michael Cronin, but "the visible translators are almost invariably those from developed Western countries" ("Deschooling" 254). Arguably, though, some of the least visible translators operating in the developed West are in Australia, a site rarely visited in translation studies research, and where the power of English is promoted in formal education, and, in universities, animated discussion of difference primarily takes place in a single tongue, namely English. The translator, however, is active in multicultural Australia, and has a growing fictional presence in Australian literary productions.[1] This paper focuses on the fictional translator in Yasmine Gooneratne's *The Pleasures of Conquest* (1996) and how the visibility of the translator and the construction of his or her identity rest on perceptual selectivity, the ways of seeing or censoring shaped by culture.

The Invisible Translator

Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995) is an extended study of the Anglo-American tradition of acquiescence in translation. It begins with a quotation by Norman Shapiro, which compares "a good translation" to a pane of glass: "It should never call attention to itself" (1). This criterion might also be applied to a successful ideology and it is precisely this collusion with dominant modes of thought that troubles Venuti about the transparent "domesticating" translation. He asserts that such transparency, as well as the "invisibility" of the translator are responsible for "a mystification of troubling proportions, an amazingly successful concealment of the multiple determinants and effects of English language translation [and] the multiple hierarchies and exclusions in which it is implicated" (16). In Venuti's view, to "out" the translator is a political act of resistance, and he argues in favour of foreignizing English translation as

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[1] The fictional translator can also be found in Noelle Janaczewska's bilingual play, *The History of Water/Huyên thoai môt goòng nu'òc* (1995) and Annamarie Jagose's novel *In Translation* (1994). The visibility of the language professional in Australia is also obliquely raised by the performance of high-profile Australian Nicole Kidman's performance in Sydney Pollack's 2005 film *The Interpreter*.

a "form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism" (20) to challenge hegemonic target-language cultural values. In short, he replaces Shapiro's definition of 'a good translation' with his own.

There is plenty of evidence and little argument that "ethnocentric translating has underwritten Anglo-American imperialism"[2] (Venuti, *Reader* 337), but translation can be wielded by an agent with any agenda. This does not make translation a "neutral" practice, of course, but one that can be networked in many different and complex ways without being consistently associated with any particular content, agent or interest (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 27). The choice to "foreignize" or "domesticate" a translation, then, or to translate for a dominant cultural, linguistic, or political power cannot be viewed as "progressive or regressive in and of itself" (Gentzler, "Power" 197). The translator is not a fixed sign, either:

> Nowadays, one and the same language practitioner may interpret for gypsies about to be returned to their country of origin or refugees fighting for their rights; s/he may translate annual reports containing falsified accounts as well as documents allowing the distribution of IT equipment. Acting on behalf of establishments as well as counter-establishments, translators face socio-political tensions and contradictions [and] translation cannot be proclaimed with any certainty as a tool against ethnocentrism, colonialism, racism, sexism, etc. (Gambier 67)

In short, the transparency of a translation or invisibility of a translator is not necessarily synonymous with the maintenance of any particular dominant power structure or ideology. How the agent or practice appears is a matter of perception.

Siting the Translator in Australia

Australia is generally considered and represented as an anglophone country, but for a growing number of Australian citizens, "English is a foreign, a second, an international, or a global language, not the languages of a unitary mother tongue and culture" (Kramsch 1245). Gooneratne presents these linguistic conditions in her first novel, *A Change of Skies* (1991), when Bharat Wickramsingha, a linguistics professor, moves from Sri Lanka to Australia to teach at a university. He finds Asian children refugees "expected to learn [English] by osmosis. [O]ur ESL teachers are trained in the concept but don't necessarily *speak* a second language" (282), and shifts his priorities as a

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[2] See, for example, Eric Cheyfitz's *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from "The Tempest" to Tarzan*, or Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* for extended discussions.

language teacher to address this problem.[3]

In that same novel, Gooneratne also notices the invisibility that occurs when languages go unrecognized, and a linguistic intolerance in Australians that asserts the hegemony of English over any need to learn another language. Bharat's Grandfather Edward, a young "Asian Grandee," travelling from Colombo to Queensland in the 1880s, notes the ship captain's impatience with transcribing the "jaw-breaking Sinhalese names [that] take up a whole line on the page of my --- ledger" (52). He prefers their names recognizable, like "Pumpkin or—Potato head" (52), following a precedent set in the Kimberleys where the names of vegetables and other foodstuffs were used in lieu of the "lengthy tribal names of the Aboriginal people they found living on the land they desired to annex for their cattle stations & grain-fields (52-3). Gooneratne shows a conflation being made by Australians not only in seeing no difference among Asians, but also none between Asians and Aboriginals. In fact, Grandfather Edward had already experienced the linguistic intolerance of Anglophone authority before he ever set sail from Colombo. To fund his journey, he had found self-employment as a petition-drawer, that is, a community translator for legal purposes, as no member of the mainly Sinhala- or Tamil-speaking public could make requests to the colonial government unless they were submitted in English.

The Biography of a Fictional Translator

In her playful but critical novel, *The Pleasures of Conquest*, Gooneratne looks at some of the cultural positions, including invisibility, assumed and enforced by the translator in colonial and postcolonial Amnesia, a fictitious Asian island republic. The author borrows the name of 'Amnesia' from the Sri Lankan journalist Tarzie Vittachi[4] for a nation "that has forgotten its history (except when there is some profit to be made out of remembering it)" (*Pleasures* "Author's note" 391). The name change, says Gooneratne, allows "me to write about Sri Lanka as an ex-colony in Asia without needing to confine myself exclusively to historical fact" ("Interview"). However, in *This Inscrutable Englishman: Sir John D'Oyly (1774-1824)*, a biography she wrote with her partner, historian Brendon Gooneratne, she pays careful attention to the facts of a translator's life that inspired the creation of

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[3] There may be a tendency in Australia to equate translation with language acquisition rather than bilingual mastery. Sean Scalmer, for example, devotes the first chapter in *Dissent Events: Protest, the Media and the Political Gimmick in Australia* (2002) to aligning the importation and performance of political dissent with translation, but then describes translation as stages of language learning, namely "halting, piecemeal" practice, comparative usage, and "achievement of fluency in the speaking of a new language" (29).

[4] The dedication in *The Pleasures of Conquest* begins: "To the memory of Tarzie Vittachi, ambassador for twenty-five years of the Sovereign Republic of Amnesia."

John D'Esterey, her fictional translator in *The Pleasures of Conquest.*

D'Oyly's command of language and cultural literacy led to his appointment as Chief Translator to the Government in Ceylon. Later this position encompassed in a covert capacity the role of an intelligence officer. Another covert aspect to D'Oyly's life developed, as well, with regard to the nature of his relationship with the Sinhala poet, Cornelia Perumal, or Gajaman Nona. Her own literary studies were conducted under Karatoka Sri Dhammarama, who also instructed D'Oyly. Gajaman's love of literature had motivated her decision to try to pass as a boy in order to enter the exclusively male preserve of the temple and the literary arts. In other words, while Sinhala literary culture was ready to admit change, it was closed to women. The biographers make clear that the "absence of detailed or reliable information about the inner lives of the 'other', non-British personalities in our story became especially obvious when we came to consider the experiences of the women in it" (Gooneratne & Gooneratne 3). The only records of Gajaman are her own literary works.

There are no official or personal records of D'Oyly's meeting with Gajaman to discuss her petition. In 1805, the British were inviting petitions for redress of any injustices suffered under Dutch rule. D'Oyly, the newly-appointed Agent of Revenue in Matara receives the poet's petition, written in Sinhala verse. Granted an interview, and even supplied with the funds to dress properly for it, Gajaman meets D'Oyly. In the immediate wake of that unrecorded interview, the poet receives title to the village of Nonogama and its environs. Reasons for D'Oyly's generosity go unrecorded, but speculation circulates in Sinhala in oral narratives, such as folk ballads. There is also fictional debate concerning the translator's motivations in *The Pleasures of Conquest.*

The absence of any records concerning Gajaman and her petition appears deliberate, given the meticulous and detailed notes D'Oyly kept of his intelligence activities and statements made among the network of agents that linked the royal court of Kandy, various chiefs, and Buddhist priests. As the sole Sinhala-speaking member of the British Administration in Ceylon, D'Oyly's position as translator was pivotal and powerful. In fact, despite having no military training or experience, he accompanied British troops during the 1815 invasion of Kandy as Commissioner to the Governor. D'Oyly's appointment, his biographer's speculate, was largely due to his careful preparation of a proposal based on an analysis of failed attempts at invasion that followed Captain Arthur Johnson's first principle, which stressed "the expediency of European officers learning the native languages" (Gooneratne & Gooneratne 128). D'Oyly's linguistic skills harnessed for the gathering of military intelligence is exemplary in demonstating how translation may serve the needs of invasion and colonial enterprise. The biographers mention, as well, that D'Oyly was not only maintaining communications and gathering information. Seeking a reason to justify an invasion of Kandy, the British focused on the despotic and erratic king. D'Oyly worked to effectively isolate the Kandyan

king and undermine public affection for him. The translator, then, was also operating in the role of a spin doctor.

The Gooneratnes suggest that the British political agenda exploited the translator's linguistic skills and cultural knowledge, but did not honour the translator/intelligence officer's own deeply-felt connections with the colonized, leaving D'Oyly isolated and disillusioned. Although the success of the invasion of Kandy seems to be inextricably connected to D'Oyly's careful cover, the biographers suggest that in formulating the Act of Settlement, D'Oyly genuinely had the best interests of the Sinhalese people at heart. This position is purely speculative, however because the translator's linguistic abilities simultaneously supported contradictory agendas. On the one hand, D'Oyly was trusted and conversant enough to gather intelligence necessary to secure British possession of Kandy and depose the king, and on the other, his interactions afforded him insights into Sinhala life that exerted a great influence on his own way of seeing things.

Deep insights and linguistic access aside, though, D'Oyly seems not unlike someone like George Grey whose interest in and understanding of indigenous culture shaped a "positive policy" (Hodge & Mishra 18) used consecutively to control Aboriginal people in Australia; to establish peace and British Supremacy in New Zealand in the wake of the Maori War; and in the Cape Colony in South Africa, to resolve the conflict between the Kaffirs and the colonial power with his winning "blend of scholarly empathy and military effectiveness" (Hodge & Mishra 18). D'Oyly's identity as a translator for the colonial government was constructed to positively influence the government's acquisitive agenda, and his languages were part of that public identity.

From D'Oyly to D'Esterey

The biography of Sir John Philip D'Esterey, D'Oyly's fictional counterpart in Gooneratne's *The Pleasures of Conquest*, is embedded in the second section of the novel as the subject of American Professor Philip Destry's research. Gooneratne presents several different ways of seeing John D'Esterey, Translator in Chief to the British Crown in Amnesia, each shaped by a different critical position and project. Destry, for example, sees his namesake as a talented and savvy civil servant, adept at languages and diplomatic strategy, "deeply embroiled in what Kipling was in later years to call 'The Great Game'" (134). The translator is thus imaginatively constructed as a sophisticated imperial agent.

Destry's research assistant, Singapore-Australian graduate student Leila Tan, assesses D'Esterey career from a postcolonial perspective that is suspicious of colonial power and thus views its official records as "deeply suspect" (180). She, too, sees D'Esterey as a spy, although the

admiration that Destry feels for the translator is replaced by Tan's view of the translator as a "conman" who betrayed the Amnesian chiefs whose friendship he had cultivated, and who "had accepted his constitution because he had presented himself to them for years as a friend" (196). The sale of the king's regalia, which D'Esterey had promised to protect, along with his taking up residence in the former palace, seem damning proof of his duplicitous intentions as mediator.

A third critical position is taken by Australian academic Colin Matthews, who groups D'Esterey with Anton Chekhov and Joseph Conrad as literary "adventurers," and proposes a collaborative research project with Destry on "Amnesiac Europeans" who forgot to go home (199). Destry opposes both the premise of these writers as adventurers and the notion of sharing research findings.

We see then several possible positions assumed by the critic depending on their ideological agenda. There is the domesticating critic, such as Philip Destry, whose intellectual project is to promote himself and perpetuate the version of the American academia that recognizes his work and rewards it. Leila Tan is a resistant critic, who brings a questioning skepticism to both the subject and the materials under scrutiny. Colin Matthews' critical approach might be read as an attempt to queer the fictional translator, seeking to locate him in an alternative intercultural community. Gooneratne does not favour one approach over another, and although she is critical of Destry's intellectual dishonesty, she does not entirely dismiss his ideas, thus suggesting that the limits set by modern protocols of knowledge need to be extended by reading them all attentively.

The story of Sir John D'Esterey then is told from shifting loci of enunciation. There is D'Esterey's own slippery site as Chief Translator and Resident in professional and political terms, and eager student of Sinhala language and culture, including Buddhism, in his private life. These loci are in their turn the subject of scrutiny from a range of locations. Destry speaks from a neocolonial position as a self-styled "American Expert on Asia" (131); while Tan furthers her career by assuming a postcolonial position as an accented anglophone "American Learning Experience" (213), lecturing in American universities about "Asia. About Australia. About the real world, I mean, which is outside America" (213). Matthews, as an Australian academic is part of the anglophone West, but speaks from neither its colonial, neo-, or postcolonial "centre." In fact, Destry conjectures that Australia is "so far from the centres of civilization in terms of space that there [is] a distance interposed in terms of time as well" (135), which might occasion Matthews' interest in or understanding of an impulse to "go troppo." Gooneratne seems clearly to be constructing these loci of enunciation as not only geographical and temporal, but also ideological.

Ways of (Not) Citing

Colonialism, translation, and academic work all have relations to material, cultural, and intellectual property. Gooneratne uses corrupt transmission to make an explicit link between the compromised translator and academic. By distorting the family name she juxtaposes the translator Sir John Philip D'Esterey with the academic Professor Philip Destry. The latter identifies the former as a research subject and possible progenitor, but also as a "major example, a mentor, a model" (121), and indeed a metaphor. Destry sees his own career as an "enterprise [...] not unlike the building of an empire" (116). The cornerstone of that academic career may rest on the appropriation of ideas from his doctoral student, but for Destry, "the names inscribed in the margin of his notes in invisible ink" simply remind him that "like the imperial enterprise, academic life can also call for many little sacrifices along the way" (116). Gooneratne's wit is evident here as it is throughout the novel, but its intent is to bring attention to the intellectual dishonesty that may be practiced in the course of academic career building.

Translation, of course, has also figured as a metaphor of imperial enterprise. In "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation" (1988), Lori Chamberlain looks at the cultural values that prioritize writing over translation, that is, productive, original work over reproductive, derivative work, and finds gender distinctions at the heart of their construction. These distinctions are "only superficially a problem of aesthetics, for there are important consequences in the areas of publishing, royalties, curriculum, and academic tenure" (Chamberlain 57). The translator in traditional Western theoretical terms has been represented as a male who usurps control of the author or assumes authority over the text with greater violence. Chamberlain suggests this display of power "repeats on the sexual level the kind of crimes any colonizing country commits on its colonies" (64). Destry takes pleasure in the equation of his academic career with the building of empire and sees his own acts of intellectual and sexual exploitation as part of the "generous sharing" that marks academic research. This sharing is not reciprocal in Destry's own case, as he eschews collaborative research, preferring to take sole credit for his published work.

The margins of Destry's research, however, are "thick with content" (Spivak, "Marginality" 55), that is as elusive as D'Esterey's motivations. Any sexual relationship or emotional dimension in the professional lives of either D'Esterey or Destry are erased. In D'Esterey's records, the presence of a Sinhala women poet becomes that of "a ghost, or a shadow cast by the illuminated figure of Sir John D'Esterey" (*Pleasures* 184). Leila Tan is reduced to a footnote in Destry's research. More generally, Destry's acts of erasure and appropriation implicate the Western (anglophone) university, as well. It is largely dependent on translated texts in its curricula and research (Venuti, *Scandals* 89), but teaches the texts as if they were originally written in the translating language. Destry does not recognize his

debt to women who have been research assistants or colleagues. In teaching and research, he is just as unlikely to acknowledge his dependency on translation.

Translating for the Tourist

Academic scholarship is not the only neo-colonial practice Gooneratne connects to translation. Writing, publishing, and tourism are in the picture, as well, and foregrounded in the first section of *The Pleasures of Conquest*, which focuses on a best-selling American author's visit to Amnesia. The British colonial service discouraged interaction with the local population. Most tourists visiting Amnesia, a "tropical Third World country" (4) like Amnesia, seem to prefer similar conditions of deliberately limited contact:

> [They enjoy] all the accustomed comforts of home in terms of food, drink, living space, television programs [...] plus sea, sand, and sun. In effect, they are locals whose contact with another set of locals in the tourist location is highly ritualized. (Featherstone 67)

Language is a big part of this comfort zone. In Amnesia's New Imperial Hotel, Anglophones such as Stella face no language barriers, continuing to speak English with the hotel clerks, servers, and others working "frontstage," who accommodate the guests' monolingualism. Rohan, the young masseur that catches Stella's eye, works only part-time at the hotel but earns higher-than-average wages as one of its "English-educated staff" (6). The demand for such superb auto-translators as Rohan is high in tourism. As Michael Cronin explains:

> [T]he "inability to communicate with 'local' staff would be seen to diminish the quality of the holiday experience. An element of predictability is the ready assumption that the locals will speak the global language of the visitor. (*Lines* 122)

Rohan becomes Stella's lover while she is in Amnesia (she will later adopt him) and moves into her suite at the hotel. The "discrete and impassive" hotel staff, including Rohan's uncle who works at reception, "called Rohan 'Sir', and addressed him in English" (55). The staff may be willing or feel compelled for economic reasons to play such language games.

There are other games that they implicitly allow, as well, in order to court the American dollar and other foreign currency. Stella is not a sex tourist *per se*, as she is in Amnesia on other business, but she is a wealthy woman and aware she can afford a local boy toy. She is perhaps unaware that exploitation is reciprocal; Rohan, too, sees the writer as presenting "interesting possibilities" (11). Upon her arrival, he watches Stella sitting in the New Imperial lobby in a chair positioned on a tile floor that reproduces an early eighteenth-century mariner's chart of the Orient rendered by Gerard van Ryckman the Elder. The image reminds Rohan of his own ambitions: "[O]ld-time charts like van

Ryckman's might seem picturesque to modern eyes, but they were intended by their creators to be functional: decorative signposts that identified for men who were on the make to the fastest routes to fortune" (11). The *trompe l'oeil* effects of the lobby floor of the New Imperial suggest an image of Stella rather similar to "India Offering Her Pearls to Brittania," a painting, like van Ryckman's, commissioned by the East India Company, included in Berger's *Ways of Seeing* as exemplary of the relations set up between invader and colonized. Berger argues that the tactile surface of the oil painting itself celebrates acquisition and private property (138), and sees its continued legacy in the world of advertising. Gooneratne shows that marketing awareness is not lost on Rohan who understands how cultural capital and self-promotion indicates can be exploited to his own use.

The ostensible reasons for Stella's visit are the twinned purposes of saving the endangered Amnesian elephants and coordinating a writing project featuring nine of the "country's stupendously talented (but sadly, yet unknown) writers" (27). The Mallinson Project will also "showcase [...] specially selected ancient Amnesian sites [...], bringing their existence [...] to the attention of a hitherto uncaring world and opening them up to tourist development" (27). Gooneratne sets her novel in 1981 (two years prior to the civil war in Sri Lanka). The Amnesian government embraces the timely Project as "rumours of terrorism in the north of the island and of bomb scares in the south had been causing nervous tourists to cancel their reservations" (22). However, Stella's real reasons for being in Amnesia are neither environmental nor strictly literary. She is there to promote her career.

Although a successful writer, Stella's work is dismissed by literary critics and academics. Given its potential to enhance her reputation, the Mallinson Project to save endangered elephants and unknown Amnesian writers is attractive not only to Stella, as "an artist, with an artist's sensibilities" (5), but to her New York publisher, publicist, accountant, and the Amnesian Minister of Tourism and Immigration. All agree that it will generate a great deal of money for the environmental cause, as well as raising the international profile of the Amnesian writers involved and Amnesia's troubled tourist industry. The locally beneficial project, however, will be conducted and written in English, published in the United States, and marketed and distributed through American channels to a reading public with an appetite for ethnic writers and the exotic. Gooneratne is clearly indicating whose dominion continues to reign over language, story, and discourse.

Even the "nature" that Stella is so committed to saving is specific to certain traditions and privileges, and circulates in a particular version of environmentalism or literary genre. For example, "Stella had enormous difficulty convincing her collaborators that coconut palms, which produce timber and thatch for village homes, mild for the cooking pot, and fibre for the rope-making industry, also possess great romantic potential" (56). She herself finds it difficult to accept that a young and

beautiful heroine can be described as having a "manner of walking [...] like that of an elephant in the forest" (64). Stella's rejection of the image as lacking romance is countered by an Amnesian writer's observation, "You do not appreciate it, dear madam, because you have never seen an elephant walking in the forest, and because you have not yet read any of our poetry" (65). Further conflicts lead Stella to question the universality of the language of love, but also of comedy, or factual truth. The text of the Mallinson Project, is a collaborative effort, a performance of the constitutive relationship of texts that demonstrates the unpredictability that occurs when diverse past literary experiences "construct fresh and evolving constitutive networks of text with which to make sense of any new textual universe" (Harvey "Events" 99) being created by readers, writers, or translators.

Gooneratne does not dismiss the Mallinson project as shameless commercial exploitation although clearly that is part of its construction. *The Pleasures of Conquest* itself employs a breezy narrative voice, great humour and fluffy characters like Stella that allows for light and comfortable reading, until the "easy" pleasure of the text is deliberately tripped up by the image of a sex tourist photographing a very young naked boy on the beach, or the shock of racist words uttered by an "angelic" child.

(Not) Overlooking the Inconspicuous

In *The Practice of Diaspora*, Brent Hayes Edwards recalls Walter Benjamin's advice for "significant literary effectiveness":

> [N]urture the inconspicuous forms that fit its influence in active communities better than does the pretentious, universal gesture of the book – in leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards. [...] Opinions are to the vast apparatus of social existence what oil is to machines: one does not go up to a turbine and pour machine oil over it; one applies a little to hidden spindles and joints" (8)

Gooneratne moves in this direction in the latter half of the novel when she introduces Angela Van Langenberg Forbes, another intercultural figure, once a freelance journalist of "part European descent" in Sri Lanka, and now living and working in London. Her decision to emigrate with her husband Peter, a British soldier, and their son follows the failure of a coup attempt in which Peter had played a key role. The culture shock that Angela experiences stems primarily from racism. Both she and her son Julian hear its vocabulary frequently as immigrants in London. Julian acquires the new words and stops talking about his life. As the narrator explains:

> His experiences at school in London were probably no better and no worse than those of any other immigrant child in a racist country. Angela and Peter had no idea what they were, since

Julian never mentioned them. (231)

Gooneratne is subtly moving the site of translation from the intercultural contact of exploration and conquest, and even past the more institutionalized transactions of business or government diplomacy, to the quotidian of intra-social and intercultural contact in contemporary immigrant communities.

Through the academics' failure to find the evidence they seek to critically assess D'Esterey, Gooneratne suggests that many answers lie in translation activity outside "*official* culture – the major [...] publishing firms, [...] established universities, and [...] official government circles" (Gentzler, "Americas" 10) and records. Biographical researches of Sir John D'Oyly are attempts to raise the visibility of the translator as "an individual human being speaking and acting on his or her own behalf" (Pöchhacker 17), even when professionally he is a visible cog in "the heavy apparatus of the dominating knowledge machine" (Longley 29). This project is similar to Pym's attempt to bring into view a translator hitherto unnoticed in the discussions of Venuti and Schleiermacher: someone with allegiances neither to source nor target text/culture but to himself or herself.

Unofficial translation activity takes the form, perhaps, of staff discussions behind the scenes at a hotel like the New Imperial. Angela discovers what goes unremarked by the American author and academics, namely the history of the hotel itself. It was originally built as a barracks in 1592 to accommodate mercenaries protecting the Inner Kingdom from Western invasion, and underwent subsequent translations under Portuguese, Dutch, and finally, British rule, when it became the official headquarters of the Honourable John D'Esterey Esquire. Angela acquires this information partly from books, but also through conversations with her mother who worked as head of housekeeping at the hotel for four decades. Conversation is ephemeral, but can carry a great deal of information left off the record. As Angela sits in the bar of the New Imperial reading a newspaper, she overhears the talk of foreign correspondents from England, Australia and South Africa in Amnesia to cover the civil unrest. She scans the local newspaper she is reading but finds "nothing in it about activities in the north" (251). In their official capacities as translators, local Amnesian guides and hotel workers whose livelihoods depend on the tourist industry do not mention any current unrest to vacationers, either.

Women are also positioned outside "official" translation. In spite of her beauty and local renown as a poet, even Dona Isabella, fictional counterpart of Sinhala poet Cornelia Perumal, or Gajaman Nona, is left out of the record. Her story instead is held in the memory of her descendent Mallika, Rohan's aunt. Denied an education as a girl and therefore illiterate, Mallika keeps her stories within her instead of writing them down, and includes Dona Isabella Cornelia's life as part of history conceived as something "passed down ...by word of mouth, from generation to generation, sometimes as story, sometimes as song, always as something to be shared and learned from and

delighted in" (296). In other words, in Amnesia, a country that has forgotten its history, the unrecorded has not disappeared but held in long and attentive memories, off the record.

Mallika's relationship to both memory and to words is not mediated by textual practice: she does not memorize texts, nor does she see words as the discrete items they appear to be in print. Oral memory engages the body in the holding and telling of the story so there is no apparent space between an individual and communal structures (Ong 178). The final section of Gooneratne's novel reminds the reader that at the same time that cultures of writing turn into cultures of digitalization and the electronic image, three-quarters of humanity are illiterate. Yet Mallika is a crucial fictional translator because in the unwritten histories she relates are lives and tongues that have gone unrecorded, and lessons and mentalities of the past that relate directly to all of us.

Mallika is a translator for the woman whose baby son she cares for. The woman is well-known as a teacher of English and is a member of the Mallinson Project. She transcribes an inherited and improvised song of Mallika's and then translates it into English. The writer then is also translator, while Mallika becomes an author and her position as a literary source is made visible with the publication of her song as poem. Mallika later interprets the insults and obscenities of a neighbourhood argument for the writer, and this leads to the recording of Mallika's own life. The collection of stories, gathered at "no fixed time or place" (361), is a task integrated into life, an aspect of women's work. Gooneratne sees it not as a product of postcolonial cultural energy but claimed as the tradition of "strong-willed and resourceful women, ashamed neither of their skills nor of their desires" (363). The voice of the indigenous woman here is neither "disabled" by illiteracy nor envious of urban modernity. Still this version of D'Esterey's is not presented as definitive or "truer" than any other. Rather it forms part of a conversation between Mallika and her translator that invites further conjecture.

Mallika hails the colonial D'Esterey as a wise and kind "white Raja," while the writer suggests a government cover-up for religious reasons. According to the writer, D'Esterey's imperial allegiances are called into question by Buddhism and its teachings of impermanence "which [he] found hard to accept since [they] seemed to oppose everything his empire stood for" (375). The facts concerning D'Esterey's conversion to those teachings and his death in a Buddhist monastery are buried along with him in the pomp of a state funeral choreographed to leave no question of D'Esterey's loyalties. The Buddhist ordination of a "British civil servant (if news of it had been allowed to get about) would have scandalized the British government. It could have destroyed the government" (377). In other words, the novel offers the possibility that the censorship that erased parts of the translator's life was not an effort to cover up questionable romantic affiliations but rather, ideological ones.

The novel offers one more way of seeing the life of D'Esterey in its final configuration of the translator as a metaphysical enigma. Performing a series of reincarnations through nominal distortion and translocations, D'Esterey emerges in a new translation as His Grace and Supreme Holiness Guru Sri Rohan Mahadev D'Esterey. Relocated to New York as Stella Mallinson's adopted son, Rohan is the heir to the writer's fortune when she dies of a drug overdose. He uses his talents for languages and mimicry, as well as his good looks, to promote his own career as a spiritual teacher. The language of the newspaper and television travel along with his image, so that even in Amnesia, the popular *sadhu* is described in terms of his "charisma" and "personality" (385). It is not the vocabulary so much as his visibility in the media that gives the guru such considerable intercultural capital. Gooneratne's replicating translator is here crucially linked to the growing importance of television and film images in late modernity, that is, to the "commodity production of a more visual character, which can replicate images endlessly and beam them virtually anywhere" (Cronin, *Lines* 81). The digital image and the manipulated media version of a story acquire the authenticity of private memory as they infiltrate and mingle with it.

Conclusion

In *The Pleasures of Conquest*, Gooneratne places the construction of a fictional translator at the centre of her story about serial imperialisms, and thus brings together translation's social and historical roles and notions of self. The fictional presence of the translator as a student of Buddhism, and in a later version, as a spiritual teacher may be seen as a narrative attempt to "reconstitute and repair ruptures between body, self, and world by linking-up and interpreting different aspects of biography in order to realign present and past and self with society" (Williams 209). Keith Harvey has pointed out that the translator's textual intervention is more complicated than the writer's because of the manner in which the socio-cultural references are registered and recomposed (98) and the intertextual connections not just made in the text but by the translation. The translator's fictional presence in a text should then complicate the language of the text itself, which, like a body, carries the traces of its own development, and bring attention to the body and tongue of a text, as well as its missing parts.

Gooneratne has the translator appear and re-appear in different places, times, and positions. In this reworking, the contradictory motivations of Sir John D'Esterey, who seems deeply interested in Sinhala culture and yet works just as diligently to destroy it, can be seen operating in contexts other than colonial. The name "D'Esterey" undergoes mutation to mark the shift in context, and to connect as well as juxtapose different times and places, as well as ideological locations, such as religion,

politics, and academia. Gooneratne emphasizes the elusive nature of the translator, whose contradictions baffle his academic trackers. Perhaps it bears mentioning that the father of the A-bomb JR Oppenheimer was a multilingual Sanskrit scholar who wrote short stories in imitation of Chekhov, taught at Berkeley, and hosted fundraisers for the republican cause in the Spanish Civil War.

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