

Introduction

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ALLOW US TO RESTATE THE PROBLEM

So you find yourself with a translation in your hands. This one, for instance:

The king stares, unblinking, at your portrait
on the wall, drinking you in
with eyes red from tears
or maybe it's from the fire
you've lit inside him.

The questions start. Who is this crying king? Who is the speaker? Who is the “you” being addressed? More questions follow, but of a different kind. Where does this come from? What is the text's name? In what language? Who wrote it? When? These are all good questions, and there are good answers to be had for them. But notice how your mind is off and running. Running away from the text.

What comes next in the translation may make you stop in your tracks:

Allow me to restate this problem:

- 1) He's studying that painting of you
- 2) Unblinking
- 3) With deep attention and affection.
- 4) There are tears in his eyes.
- 5) Those tears are mine, says the eye. That's what happens
if you don't blink.
- 6) No way, says Love. They're all mine.
- 7) This dispute remains
unsolved.

Note that this second verse does what it says: it restates the first. It stays with it, closely, but it also adds something. It asks what it means to “stare, unblinking.” What it means to have a fire lit “inside you.” These, too, are good questions, but where are answers to be found for them? Actually, nowhere but here. Answers

present themselves when the act of looking and crying is redescribed as an unsolved dispute between the eye and Love. Did you see this coming?

We didn't.

This volume shares what we discovered after our initial surprise. It is all about the pleasures of reading and rereading translations with unblinking eyes.

It's common knowledge that we live in a boomtime for translations. There are publishers dedicated to making literatures of one culture available to readers from another; universities teach courses like "Japanese Literature in Translation" and "Introduction to World Literature"; there are literary prizes given to translators. Good translations are there, but less available is help in reading them. Ezra Pound published his *ABC of Reading* a century ago, but there is still no *ABC of Reading Translations*.

The situation is particularly dire for English translations of texts from South Asia: there is finally a growing body of such works, from masterpieces brought out by the Murty Classical Library of India to contemporary poetry and prose, but hardly any guidance on how to read them and especially how to enjoy them.

This volume is offered as a first step in that direction, although even this first step makes it clear that there are many good ways of reading translations. Let us turn again to the translation at hand, which, by the way, is from *Life of Naishadha*, a Sanskrit poem composed in the twelfth century by a celebrated poet, Shriharsha. As a whole, *Life of Naishadha* narrates a story that was already famous when it was written, the love story of Nala and Damayanti with its many twists and turns. But let's not be too quick to go away from the text again. Let's stay with Shriharsha and go to his next verse, which again revisits the scenario of the previous two. Nala is still gazing at a painting of her, Damayanti is told. We, however, also hear some suggestions about what we should expect of ourselves when we read a translation of a text like this:

You, lady, live in his heart,
 but you're also somehow outside him,
 in fact you're his very life's breath
 moving through nose and mouth.
 His mind, too, being utterly absorbed
 in you, never budes from that wondrous
 painting, and this, too,
 is a wonder.

We know that when we are utterly absorbed in reading, something from the outside comes to life in our heart too. The object of such rapt attention is wondrous, but so is what happens to us.

We are among the first to admit that what happens to us when we read translations, however, is often less than wondrous. This may be more about us than about the translations themselves. We are suspicious, and we justify our suspicions

with the old saw about what is lost in translation. We, in fact, worry about being deprived of the “authentic experience” of the original, instead receiving a “kiss through a veil,” as the Hebrew poet Bialik once dubbed translation. Or it may be that our awareness of how much we don’t know gets in the way. Then our good intention to learn more about another culture may overshadow the text to such an extent that we deny ourselves any of the usual pleasures of reading and prevent ourselves from imagining that it might have something to say to us.

Finally, we may worry about what the translator has added. Translators do add things, of course, just as much as they leave things out. What they add may be more valuable to us readers than we might assume, especially when what they add opens up the original text to us, sharing with us its pleasures and its possibilities.

Some might say that in the second verse of the poem quoted here, the opening line, “Allow me to restate this problem,” is an addition. Those exact words are not in the original Sanskrit text, that’s for sure. At the same time, the translation only makes explicit what is tacit in the original; namely, that the poet Shriharsha recasts in this second verse all the key players of the first one, using the very same lexical items but in a different key. As one of Shriharsha’s most sensitive readers, the fourteenth-to-fifteenth-century Sanskrit commentator Mallinatha noted: “he repeats the very same thing with a different twist.” Something is learned in the restatement, and there is also pleasure when the elegance of the “different twist” is highlighted. By adding the line “Allow me to restate this problem,” the translator, David Shulman, who did all the translations for this volume, has shared with us his own pleasure in seeing this twist, which, in fact, is a pleasure given by the text itself with its own habits of self-translation and reiterations. Shulman’s translation thus allows us to appreciate the text through his appreciating eyes; to read following the mind of a sensitive reader.

Rather than worrying over whether this line is an addition, we might better ask who the “me” in “Allow me to restate the problem” might be. There is more than one answer, and they get better as they go on. On the most basic narrative level, that “me” belongs, well, to a goose. This winged creature happens to be the go-between in this story, depicting Nala’s love to Damayanti. On another, deeper level, it belongs to the poet himself, who is restating his words from the previous verse. The “me” in question may also be the translator, literally showing us what he is doing in making Shriharsha accessible. But as an indexical word, the “me” refers to every reader of this poem who rethinks the text’s words in her own mind. When we see that anyone who voices this verse—ourselves just as much as the speaking goose—must “restate the problem” for themselves, we begin to feel that the text anticipates its readers, even the readers of its translations. We can, of course, only restate the problem if we mentally follow the lead of the text, to take up the metaphor in Toni Morrison’s apt description of reading as experiencing “one’s own mind dancing with another’s,” and especially when such active

reading is experienced as possibly leading to something unfamiliar, something new, indeed something surprising.¹

Let us restate the problem to see what is being asked of us. When we read a translation, we are asked to suspend our objections and suspicions in a leap of faith. Can a goose speak? Let's not worry about this now. How do Nala and Damayanti fall in love without even meeting? We'll find out as we read along, partly because reading a translation is like falling in love without meeting in person. Aspects of another culture seem foreign and incomprehensible? So what! That's part of the fun. A good translation is a heightened act of reading, one that uniquely embodies and boldly invites coimagination. Let us conclude this brief prologue with one more lesson from Shriharsha—the verse that immediately follows the same section:

You are continually climbing up
the tall ladder of his imagination
as he showers a rain of sighs.
From thinking only about you
he's *become* you.

It is we, the readers, who have to provide “the tall ladder of imagination,” and we have to get better at using it, setting it up in ways that the contents of the texts we read, even in translation, can climb higher and higher. To put this another way, how do we get better at reading translations, and what will we become when we do?

GETTING BETTER AT READING TRANSLATIONS

We can make a start by giving some thought to ourselves and to how we read. This includes reminding ourselves that we read in different ways for different purposes. Sometimes we read to get something that we can use, other times our reading is an end in itself. This means that when we read translations, sometimes we read to learn more about a culture in a different time or place, while sometimes we read translations just for the pleasure that the text in translation will hopefully give us. We can also remind ourselves that we approach a text in different ways. We can try to get nearer by gathering knowledge about the context and about the other texts that the original assumed its readers would know. We can also read while remaining afar, unfazed by our lack of such knowledge. For instance, we can read the translated selection from Shriharsha's text while seeking information about the characters of Nala and Damayanti and then formulate educated guesses about what may or may not happen to them, or we may approach it pretty much for the first time, aware that we lack not only expertise but also preconceptions, anticipating discovery but ever unsure about “the way in.”

We can keep on adding such dichotomies, but what already seems more important is the question of how we use them: whether we see them as “either/or” options or as possibilities for taking a “both/and” approach. By habit, we tend

to see these different ways of reading in an “either/or” way, and quite frequently a value judgment comes with that perception. That is, we see one way of reading the text as preferable to the other.

In this volume, the “both/and” approach is embraced as a way forward to our becoming better readers. The translated texts that follow—and we will say more about the process of their selection later—are coupled with short “near” and “far” essays. In our original conception, this meant that for each piece, there would be two responses. One would be written by someone who knows quite a lot about the text and its cultural and linguistic contexts, the other by someone who does not. The initial idea was that for the readers of this volume, the translations—and, in two cases, a work of visual art and two musical pieces—would be made accessible and enjoyable precisely because they are mediated by the responses of two very different readers.

We asked the writers of “near” responses to supplement the translation with knowledge and skills that the original likely assumed. This would include background information, of course, but also some insights into the protocols of reading that would inform a reader from the more immediate audience of that text. If we stick to the Shriharsha piece with which we began, we can take the essay by Gary Tubb as an example of this approach. Tubb places *Life of Naishadha* in the broad context of Sanskrit literary culture, speaking of both its accomplishments and its deserved fame. He also shares with us some of the knowledge that Shriharsha assumed in his readers, including the literary conventions that would have been familiar to them. For instance, Tubb shows us that the selection from which we sampled forms a playful meditation on a canonical list of the “ten stages of love,” beginning with the visualization of the beloved. In effect, the essay moves away from the translation to the world of its intended readers and then back to the translation in order to help us read a little bit more like they might have. Other near essays, for instance those by Archana Venkatesan and Anna Lise Seastrand (to mention but two), employ similar strategies to enable us to read an ancient Tamil poem and a work of sculptural art, respectively, closer to home.

We initially asked the writers of the “far” essays to provide a reading that would be directed toward more general insights and sensibilities with the expectation that this would help someone totally new to South Asian texts to read them in translation. We invited contributors who we admired as readers but who were at least once-removed from these texts to share their responses to the translations. In doing so, we were guided by the truth expressed by Robert Scholes, following Derrida, that “a written text can survive the absence of its author, the absence of its addressee, the absence of its object, the absence of its context, the absence of its code—and still be read.”² South Asian texts are no exception to this truth.

But we were, at first, surprised to discover how difficult the writing of such a far response proved to be. This happened for two reasons. All of the texts translated here come from South Asia, and for some far-readers who had no familiarity

whatsoever with such works—for us, the ideal far-readers—they felt completely inaccessible. Others, who had considerable knowledge about South Asia generally but little familiarity with the specific text at hand, sometimes found it very difficult not to try to read as “experts.” The varied difficulties that the writers of the far essays faced or articulated taught us something about the challenges of reading translations in general, and South Asian texts in particular.

The resulting far essays illuminated something critical about the different ways we can read translations, something that becomes obvious when they are compared with the near essays: the far essays are far more diverse than the near ones. Some far readers opted for a comparative approach. For instance, Meir Shahar compares a translation of the Malayalam-language version of the earlier-mentioned Nala-Damayanti story to the Chinese *Peony Pavilion*, and Yehoshua Granat reads the translation of the Tamil Ramayana with the Song of Songs in mind. Muzaffar Alam’s approach is to grab ready-at-hand comparisons, and he reads the Telugu version of *Story of the Four Dervishes* in the light of versions he already knew in other languages. Other readers go personal, allowing the translation to resonate with aspects of their own life story. For example, Sanjay Subrahmanyam brings his childhood memories into his reading of a translation of a modern Telugu short story, and R. Cheran reads some selections from Tamil texts that are nearly two millennia old as a witness and victim of the recent genocidal war against Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Then there is the reflexive approach, also seen in Cheran’s essay, where he reflects on his reading as that of a survivor. Other far readers try to bracket their own personal identity. A striking example is Sheldon Pollock’s response to the Tamil-language version of, yet again, the Nala-Damayanti story, in which he imagines how he would have read the text had he been totally unfamiliar with it and its conventions (framing, of course, his imagined unfamiliarity with his intimate knowledge of South Asia). The result is a pointed meditation on the topic of sensitively reading a translation or even reading more generally. In turning their attention to the act of reading itself, these far readers model how to become sensitive to our own sensitivities when reading translation. Finally, a far-reading can result in a literary piece in its own right, a poem that responds to a poem, as in the case of Peter Cole’s reaction to translations of Ghalib and Hafez.

The authors of some near essays are super near, in the sense that there is hardly a degree of separation between them and their subject matter. For example, Afsar Mohammad personally knew his fellow Telugu poet Ismail, and refers in his essay to conversations they had. An even more extreme example is T.M. Krishna, one of the world’s most acclaimed Carnatic vocalists, who writes on a piece he himself performs regularly. This is, of course, a privilege that the far readers did not have, and they sometimes compensate for its lack by establishing some kind of kinship with the translator, David Shulman. One example is Gabriel Levin’s reading of the same poems by Ismail, with the help of Shulman’s published diary from his time in

Andhra. Another is Donald Davis's sense of affinity with and admiration for Shulman as a scholar that emboldens him to approach Carnatic music sympathetically.

Our comparison of the near essays with the far ones revealed something else important. The near essays often seem to aim at a certainty about their resulting interpretation and to provide reassurance that it is correct. Indeed, they do give us good reasons to feel confident about what they say about the meanings of the text. By contrast, the far essays, in all their variety, relish the new possibilities of understanding and insight that become present, once the initial obstacles on the way into the texts are overcome. In the near essays, definite interpretations hold our attention; in the far ones, the new possibilities of meaning invite us to go further, even if they come with considerable uncertainty, such as is expressed in the title of Thibaut d'Hubert's essay, "If I Am Reading You Right." In a crucial way, it may be that the practices of translation themselves create the conditions for encountering and engaging exciting new possibilities of meaning, so much so that we can talk about, to use the words of the title of Sonam Kachru's far essay, "What's Gained in Translation."

The contrasts that we have been making between the near and far essays are not the last thing to be said, though, since the comparison reveals important similarities as well. Taken together, it is obvious that every author in this volume refers to additional works other than the translated. This is a simple observation but an important one. It reminds us of that basic truth that reading is inherently an intertextual activity. We cannot help but connect whatever we are reading at the moment with what we have read before, and our understanding of any literary work depends on how we read it in the light of others. Of course, choices are made, but the fundamental point that reading translations, too, is always an intertextual activity needs to be highlighted.

Some of the near essays subsist on a somewhat more ascetic diet of texts that are deemed intertextually relevant. In some cases, the restriction is primarily to very intimate intertexts, as in Ilanit Loewy Shacham's study of Bhattumurti's Telugu *Vasu's Life*: she compares the section translated here with other portions from the same work and with a passage from the *Mahabharata* epic that serves as a source to Bhattumurti. In others, an entire literary corpus comes to the fore, as when Jennifer Clare states, speaking of ancient Tamil poetry, that "the poems' deep connection with other poems in the tradition generates an intertextual web of signification from which an individual verse cannot be extricated." Ironically, as Clare helps us to see, it is only by first seeing a text as representative of a received tradition that we can also appreciate it as a unique work, by appreciating the ways in which it departs from the conventional system to which it belongs.

The realization about the intertextual nature of all acts of reading helps us understand the limits of the far-near dichotomy without undermining its usefulness. Many of the near essays also invoke remote texts in their reading of the translations, just as they employ personal resources and reflexive practices, whereas

many far essays claw their way back to stay near the original and its reception history. In fact, we should be careful not to essentialize South Asian literature in this (or any other) context. Thus when Thibaut d'Hubert frames his reading of the translation of the Sanskrit *Life of Naishadha* by citing Shriharsha's European contemporary, the Occitan troubadour Jaufré Rudel, this is not essentially different from his turning to another intertext, the Prakrit-language anthology ascribed to King Hala, who lived in a different part of South Asia roughly a millennium earlier, or his citation of a verse from a different part of the same text by Shriharsha. In fact, it could even be said that the use of the frame from Rudel's notions of *amor de lonh* (love from afar) to read *Life of Naishadha* is a generative condition for d'Hubert's subsequently turning to other examinations of love in separation. A turn to one intertext, far or near, thus opens up the possibility of other intertexts that might not have been considered otherwise.

So how do we become better readers of translations of South Asian texts? Our experience with this volume has taught us a key lesson, one that surprisingly came from reflecting on the far essays offered here. We never had a doubt that the patient and careful learning of the protocols of reading from other times and places can enhance our understanding and appreciation of texts that were loved in those contexts. Now we are equally sure that the more improvisatory reading that inevitably happens whenever we engage a translation, independent of the original text and the contexts that it assumes, is indispensable to discovering the potentials of a text, as new audiences climb further rungs on "the tall ladder of imagination."

Moreover, following Robert Scholes, we have been emphasizing that reading is an intertextual activity, and the translations that are increasingly available to us create new opportunities for it. Scholes also says that "reading, though it may be a kind of action, is not the whole of action but a part of it, remaining incomplete unless and until it is absorbed and transformed in the thoughts and deeds of readers."³ To us, this makes clear that translations are not condemned to remaining incomplete because they are somehow removed from their original. Translations, like all texts, are incomplete until they are absorbed and transformed in the thoughts and deeds of new readers. But in a way that would have delighted Borges, it is the originals that are incomplete until they are translated. In the end, it does not really matter which came first, as reading is always an intersubjective activity, a meeting of minds. This is an insight that Shriharsha knew firsthand, as we see if we take the goose's words to Damayanti as instructing us on how to read the translations in this volume:

[I]n fact you're his very life's breath
 moving through nose and mouth. . . .
 he's *become* you.

THE TRANSLATIONS IN THIS VOLUME

This volume does not offer a representative selection of South Asian literatures, past or present. Nor is it a presentation of a canon of the greatest works in any of the languages of South Asia, let alone all of them. Rather, it is the personal choice of one reader, David Shulman, the translator. We will say more about him later in this introduction. But first, we want to talk about the selection itself and its significance. We often take up something to read because someone else has recommended it to us: “I like this, and I think you will like it too.” The translations found in this volume are the choices of one person who has selected them from the works that he himself has found pleasure in. These, then, are his recommendations.

The vast swath of the world that we refer to as “South Asia” has a long history of literature in dozens of languages, not to mention its many traditions of sculpting, painting, theater, and music. There are cosmopolitan languages that claimed prestige and crossed regional boundaries, such as Sanskrit, Persian, and English. Then there are more local literary cultures, many of which are very old and claim equal prestige, such as Tamil, Sinhala, Hindi, and Urdu. As we speak, there is also a large number of modern expressive media, which include those mentioned earlier and many more, and the literary-linguistic situation is and has always been complex and layered, in the sense that many texts participate in conversations across linguistic lines (as we have already begun to see with the Nala and Damayanti story). This volume is not meant to be a methodical entrance into this intricate and large literary world, using the selections as if they could be gates. It is not a list of the “Great Books” of South Asian literatures.

Rather, it offers us a chance to share in someone else’s pleasures of reading, and to learn to read on the basis of the perceptions and understanding that pleasure affords. Let us formulate two principles of reading here, the principle of pleasure and the principle of sharing. What these principles actually look like in the act of reading translations can be seen in the manner in which the twentieth-century Sri Lankan novelist, Martin Wickramasinghe, introduced his translation of the poems of the first Buddhist women, the *Therigatha*. Wickramasinghe does not begin with any statement of the significance of these poems or their status as great literature. Rather, he begins with a reference to a Sinhala-language classic of poetry, the *Guttīla Kāvya*, with which he was more at home. “Whenever I was troubled or distressed,” he says, “the poetry in *Guttīla* eased my mind; whenever my mind shined with happiness, *Guttīla* increased the happiness. On the many occasions that I was happy just being lazy, it was usually to *Guttīla* that my hand reached out, and I would read whatever caught my eye wherever I happened to open the book.” He then goes on to speak about his motivation to translate poetry written in the cosmopolitan Buddhist language of Pali into Sinhala: “That satisfaction and comfort that I used to get from *Guttīla*, I now get from some of the verses of the Buddhist nuns. . . . Because of the pleasure that my mind received from

reading them, I wanted to share those songs by translating a few of them into Sinhala. There was pleasure for me even in translating these few verses into Sinhala.”⁴

Note that in articulating the rationale for his translation, Wickramasinghe begins with pleasure. As we understand it, the principle of pleasure is not at all a simple desire to feel good. Rather, it is an imaginative process of opening yourself up to comfort, to happiness, to being surprised, or even to becoming someone different. Key to this process is not approaching reading as a task to be done; on the contrary, reading might best be done when feeling lazy, even if other moods also recommend themselves.

The second principle is that of sharing. Or you might think of it as a second type of pleasure, the pleasure of sharing. For the translator, sharing entails the pleasure of imagining the pleasure of the reader. Sharing for the reader involves the pleasure of receiving a gift. David Shulman shared these selections with us in response to our request for him to translate from texts that he liked, texts that continue to give him pleasure.

None of the translations in this volume have been published before. And, as already noted, they were not selected to represent any canon. In fact, they are not even particularly representative of the work for which Shulman is known. Rather, they are translations that resulted from our request to “translate what you love, whatever you like.” Shulman’s response surprised us. It included not only texts, but also visual art and music. The textual selections went beyond what we anticipated and included texts in Malayalam and Persian (and, in the case of some stanzas, Arabic), languages from which we did not expect to receive translations. Even in translations from languages in which Shulman has done a lot of work, such as Telugu, his choices were often surprising, as in the example of *The Story of the Four Dervishes*. Shulman provided us with an “English translation of the Telugu version of the Urdu rendering of this Persian” storybook, as Muzaffar Alam insightfully portrays this layered text. The selections can be seen as a display of particularly beloved items that Shulman personally curated. We invite you to engage them as instances of our two principles of pleasure and sharing.

Let us look now at what Shulman has put into this gallery, which we have arranged in six “display rooms,” or units.

The volume begins with a unit consisting of three tellings of the Nala and Damayanti story written in three different languages: Sanskrit, Tamil, and Malayalam. None of the three is the “original” version, if there ever was one. Shulman is not alone in loving this story. It is one of the formative narratives of South Asia, just like those of Rama, Krishna, and the Buddha, and has been told numerous times. The texts Shulman translated for this unit engage not only with this vast received tradition but also with one another: the Malayalam and Tamil authors, Malaman-gala Kavi and Ativirarama Pantiyan, are clearly familiar with Shriharsha’s Sanskrit work. There is thus an added value in reading the three translations together, especially the Sanskrit and Malayalam poems, which deal with the very same mission

of the go-between goose. Nonetheless, the texts stand alone in important ways. For one thing, they are written in different languages; for another, they reflect and participate in shaping the aesthetic horizons associated with these languages.

Something of these larger received traditions is present in Shulman's translations, and the near essays help us to see this. This aid may come by drawing attention to the language resources available to the poet or to his thematic resources. For the first, consider Sivan Goren-Arzon's essay, where she contextualizes Shulman's translation in the linguistic reality of "Rubies and Coral," the name given to the particular combination of Sanskrit and Malayalam in which Malamangala Kavi composed his Nala and Damayanti story, all the while making us aware of the pleasures to be had when a skilled author tells an old story in fresh and appealing ways. For the second, look at N. Govindarajan's essay, where he contextualizes Ativirarama's telling of the same story in Tamil Tantric culture, where religious practices of meditative visualization are key. We have already alluded to the other essays in this unit—Tubb's close reading of Shriharsha's Sanskrit poem, d'Hubert's reading of it (among other things) in the light of Occitan poetry, and Shahar's comparison of the Malayalam telling to the Chinese *Peony Pavilion*. The unit concludes with Pollock's meditation on sensitive reading.

The second room of this gallery brings together translations of more recent works written in Telugu. The first is the aforementioned anonymous *The Story of the Four Dervishes*. The second is a twentieth-century short story by Abburi Chayadevi (1933–2019) that tells of a daughter visiting her aging father. Finally, there are six short poems by Mohammad Ismail (1928–2003). Taken together, they prompt the question that Gabriel Levin quotes from Shulman himself, "What does it mean to be 'modern' in Telugu?" They also share another significant quality that actually distinguishes them from each other: their use of styles and genres that have crossed linguistic, cultural, and geographical boundaries to become deeply rooted in new places. This is particularly apparent in Ismail's poems, written in free verse and a Modernist style that Levin compares to that of T. S. Eliot. One of them, "Rembrandt," depicts a painting by the Dutch artist, and another, "Left Bank, Paris," places its writing along the Seine. *Touch* is a concise short story in the tradition of Guy de Maupassant and Edith Wharton that, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam highlights, very elegantly illuminates current social issues in middle-class India (he also offers another comparison: Kafka). Afsar Mohammad, writing a near essay about Mohammad Ismail, and Gautham Reddy, writing a near essay about Abburi Chayadevi, both remind us that in order for styles and genres to cross the linguistic, cultural, and geographical boundaries that they do, individual authors have to challenge various conventions dominant in the worlds in which and about which they write. It is in a complementary vein that Muzaffar Alam, in his far essay, helps us to see that even as the fable of "Khawaja the Dog-Worshiper" from *The Story of the Four Dervishes* has a shared Islamic frame of references, the narrative and its figures are also thoroughly grounded in locales that have their own

concrete particularities; indeed these particularities sometimes remind us that this story moves beyond the confines of familiar Islamic geographies. The near essay by Jamal Jones on the same fable helps us enjoy the vast potentials of the technique of embedding inherent in it and in the larger corpus of which it is part.

You will need your media player and headphones when entering the next room. The works here also cross boundaries, this time expressive boundaries. There is a text about a performance of music, from *Chivakan's Gem that Fulfills All Wishes*, and there are recordings of two performances of vocal music in which the performers sing lyrics, as texts are called when they come with music. In short, the selections here raise questions for us about text and performance. Please bear in mind that, at least in South Asia, the literary and the performative arts are closely connected, even if some current habits dispose us to engage them separately. This separation may come at the cost of understanding, appreciating, and enjoying.

Chivakan's Gem, the first item here, is an eighth-century Tamil poem written in south India by a Jain monk, Tiruttakkatevar. Like *The Story of the Four Dervishes*, the contents of *Chivakan's Gem* involve travels to exotic lands in search of love and adventure. The selection here is about a music contest between Chivakan and a woman he meets on his travels. It tells us much about the performance of music, but it is also about love, since the contest is part of their courtship. It thus invites us to think about the similarities between music and love, and the three essays responding to this piece guide us through different ways of exploring what this similarity entails. The near essay, by Talia Ariav, lays out Tamil-specific protocols of reading that go back centuries to the oldest extant canon of love poetry in this language, which we visit again in unit 5. Kesavan Veluthat creates a middle position for us between a near and far perspective: he places the selection in a context of Sanskrit conventions and intertexts that were also in conversation with those of Tamil. Finally, Sonam Kachru meditates on the act of listening itself: listening to music, to poetry, and to oneself when reading. Kachru's essay should also be read together with Pollock's as a general reflection on how to read translations.

The recordings in this unit are of two pieces by Muttusvami Dikshitar (1775–1835), a south Indian poet and composer, performed by two musicians: one a world-famous professional, the other a talented amateur. The songs are addressed to Hindu deities, and the closeness of art and religion is felt here, just as it is in the Jain *Chivakan's Gem* and in the Islamic *Story of the Four Dervishes*. If *Chivakan's Gem* makes us see what music can look like, these recordings enable us to hear how poetry can sound. The first recording is by T.M. Krishna, and he also provides his own essay about the two performances. His essay guides us from looking at music from the inside—that is, how it feels when he performs—to looking at it from the outside—that is, what happens when he listens to someone else singing. Donald Davis's essay reverses this movement of engagement and appreciation, starting from a standpoint of distance and even dislike and looking for a way in. Davis reminds us that not everything we encounter presents itself to us as something we

want to “get inside.” Sensitive reading can lead to discomfort and disapproval as well as to the satisfaction, comfort, and pleasure that Wickramasinghe found in his reading of the poems of the first Buddhist women.

The selections in the fourth unit give us a chance to consider this contrast between pleasure and disapproval in the context of a tacit concern of this volume, namely, the many contours and vagaries of love. The first item here is a sculpture of a loving couple, embodiments of love and desire, found in a Hindu temple in the south Indian city of Kanchipuram; another reminder of the expressive closeness of art and religion in this world. Anna Lise Seastrand, a specialist on south Indian art, and Tawfiq Da’adli, a specialist on West Asian Islamic art, share with us how they look at sculptures. They do so as if they were taking us by the hand through the temple and to the sculpture, all the while directing our attention to various details that caught their attention, each from her or his own perspective. What they show us is that reading sculptures is not all that different from reading translations.

The sculpted figures sit atop their mounts, armed and ready for battle, reminding us of the complex power dynamics that love and desire can entail. These are the focus of the next two selections in this unit. The first is from Kamban’s Tamil version of the Rama story, which, as we noted, is one of the formative narratives of South Asia, told again and again, like the story of Nala and Damayanti. The selection here focuses on a key moment in the story. It is a scene of threat, seduction, and resistance, when Ravana, king of demons, thinks he can win the heart of Sita, Rama’s wife, whom he has abducted and keeps as his prisoner. The entire scene is witnessed by Rama’s trusted deputy, the monkey Hanuman, sitting atop a tree. The two readers, for their part, come to this ambiguous, indeed troubling, scene from very different directions. Yehoshua Granat approaches it with comparisons from afar, including the Bible’s primordial temptation scene in the Garden of Eden, while Whitney Cox uses comparisons that are nearer at hand in Sanskrit. Their comparisons help us to see that what Cox said about the transcendent and the everyday is also true about the comforting and the discomforting: they are “found side by side: they join up, blur into one another, and come away transformed.”

Discomfort and comfort are to the fore in the last item in this unit, from *Vasu’s Life* by the sixteenth-century Telugu poet Bhattumurti. The selection consists of two separate scenes: one between a mountain (male) and river (female) that ends in rape; the other, which ends very differently, features Vasu, the hero of the work, and Girika, the daughter born as a result of that earlier rape. Ilanit Loewy Shacham and Deven Patel focus our attention on how Bhattumurti shapes his version of this complex and disturbing story, known in other versions too, and voice for us some of the doubts and questions to which the story can give rise. For example, Loewy Shacham focuses on the river’s desperate attempts to talk her way out from the encounter with the aggressive mountain, whereas Patel highlights, among other things, the mountain’s words as “a coarse, craggy finger brushing

against her moist cheek.” Bhattumurti’s accomplishment is that he takes us, in language, to the very limits of language; here what can be said and what can’t be said are, to quote Cox again, “found side by side: they join up, blur into one another, and come away transformed.”

The selections in the penultimate unit five are from the earliest extant Tamil anthologies, dating to the first centuries CE and collectively known as “Sangam poetry.” The intricate system of conventions that permeates this corpus continued to play an important role for many centuries and informs all of the Tamil works in this volume: from *Chivakan’s Gem* and Kamban’s *Ramayana* to Nammalvar’s *A Hundred Measures of Time*, featured in the next and final unit. Here we offer two selections from Sangam poetry. The first is a series of ten poems, “Ten on the Wild Boar,” from what is probably the earliest anthology of love poetry in Tamil. A woman is speaking to a confidante about the man she loves, but “a boar with small eyes / and big rage” is repeatedly alluded to in her words. Archana Venkatesan places this decad in the context of the ancient system of Tamil poetics and helps us see that it presents a picture of love that is, once again, uncomfortable: “savagely, capricious, and disruptive”; a love that is “both nourishment and illness, and . . . that needs to be both tamed and contained.” The second selection consists of three more love poems from three additional anthologies: in the first, a man berates his heart, compared to a wingless heron, for falling for a faraway woman; in the second, a separation from a man whose heart was “still thinking about money” is averted at the last minute in a sudden moment of softness; in the third, a complex love triangle, involving a man, his wife, and his lover, gradually unfolds through a seemingly innocent street-encounter between the lover and a child whose mother turns out to be the wife. Jennifer Clare gives these three vignettes a slow, careful reading that compares them to one another and that places them in the system of Tamil “interior landscapes.” She also uses the poems to reflect on the experience of reading them. She notes, for instance, apropos of the third poem, that we readers “realize, along with the faithless husband, that we too have been subjected to a sleight of hand, in which what appeared simple and innocent is in fact full of deceptions.” R. Cheran then gives the entire section a broad overview from his multiple perspectives as a reader, as a poet in both Tamil and English, and as a refugee from Sri Lanka now living in the Tamil diaspora in Canada. He thus places them within a new “interior landscape” of the twenty-first century.

The last unit in this volume brings together poetry by three authors: a selection from *A Hundred Measures of Time* (to use the title Archana Venkatesan has given this poem in her own translation of it) by the eighth or ninth century Hindu saint, Nammalvar; a poem by the fourteenth-century Persian poet, Hafez; and a poem by Ghalib, who wrote in Urdu and Persian in the nineteenth century.⁵ These three will strike many as poles apart: one Hindu, the others Muslim; one writing in Tamil, the others in Persian and Urdu; each distant from the others by about half

a millennium; two cherished across north India and Pakistan, the third in south India and Sri Lanka. Taken together, however, the three authors teach us about reading as an intertextual activity: it pays to be experimental. The texts brought together in this unit also highlight that an ever-present question in sensitive reading is *who am I when I am reading you?* In fact, they articulate the question for us. A couplet from Ghalib's ghazal in this unit puts it this way:

Don't ask what state I'm in after you.
Ask yourself what you're feeling when you're around me.

We see the presence of this question acknowledged directly in Andrew Ollett's far essay on *A Hundred Measures of Time*, where he describes how it was only when his initial frustrating efforts to make sense of the poem gave way to the command in the poem itself to "look to your own lives inside this world" that he could sense what the work brought into being. In a complementary way, Anand Venkatkrishnan's near essay brings into relief how "the puzzles in Nammalvar's . . . jagged, searching poems" disorient readers and prepare us for possibilities for living that as yet remain hidden to us. The selections by Hafez, a Persian poet whose works came to be loved in South Asia, and Ghalib, a nineteenth-century poet who wrote in both Urdu and Persian, also thematize this question, as the couplet quoted above suggests. Rajeev Kinra's meditative essay traces the resonances between the intertextual and the intersubjective in these two poets. What Kinra says about Ghazal poetry is true of sensitive reading generally: its pleasures lie "precisely in the jostling of . . . multiple interpretations—as well as other potential readings—bouncing off one another, always in a state of suspended animation."

We end this unit with Peter Cole's own poetic and intersubjective response to Hafez and Ghalib, but especially to David Shulman himself, showing us that the implicit question "Who am I?" is really asking "Who are you?"

I imagine, therefore you

are. Therefore, imagine, so that I might be
with you, wandering friend, when these debts come due.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

David Shulman has translated many South Asian literary works into English (as well as Hebrew), on his own and in collaboration with others. These translations span a remarkable rainbow of South Asian languages—Sanskrit, Tamil, and Telugu—and include works that were composed at different times and places, in a whole spectrum of genres. Together with his teacher and friend Velcheru Narayana Rao, he produced a unique library of works from the Telugu literary tradition that had been inaccessible to English readers. This library includes poetry and prose,

premodern and modern works, and also representative works as well as singular texts. Moreover, this rich output from Telugu is coupled with introductory essays and contextual scholarship that make the individual works and the tradition from which they come accessible to their new audiences.

Shulman's translations are not only to be found between the covers of individual publications. Translations of a wider range of texts and from an even wider range of languages are to be found in his scholarly monographs and articles, beginning with his first monograph, *Tamil Temple Myths*, and continuing through to his most recent publications, such as *More than Real*, his monograph on the history of imagination in south India. We can expect to see more of such *muktakas* (independent pearls) in his scholarship to come, including his ongoing work on south Indian classical music and the living tradition of Sanskrit drama, Kudiyyattam. We had a glimpse of these broader horizons of scholarship whenever we had a chance to listen to him think out loud about possible choices to include in this volume, and there were many that did not end up here: from the Vedas, the Sanskrit grammarians Panini and Patanjali, and the Persian poet Bedil, to name just a few.

Shulman's deserved recognition as a translator is not only due to the scale and scope of his corpus, but also its quality. This quality stems first from his outstanding philological skills and from the sheer expressive beauty of his English. This beauty is a function of his freedom and pleasure as a translator, and as a scholar he is unusually consistent about articulating his pleasure as a reader of South Asian texts; this quality of his scholarship is very visible in his *Tamil: A Biography*. But this pleasure and this freedom both originate in his deep respect for the original in all its levels: from the morphology to the lexical choices and from the musicality to the overall meaning. The beauty of the English in his translations is no surprise either, given that Shulman is a poet in his own right, and that his nonacademic writing is also stunningly poetic. The title of Whitney Cox's essay in this volume, "Tamil as a Kind of Sanskrit," applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Shulman's translations: they are English as a kind of Telugu, Tamil, and so on.

In addition to his standard-setting translations, Shulman has helped to set new expectations from translations of South Asian texts in his efforts as an editor and a member of the editorial board of the Murty Classical Library of India and other venues and projects. Many have benefited from his generosity privately, as he has so often been willing to go over and make suggestions to a plethora of translations; the two of us can certainly testify to this wonderful generosity firsthand. This is also the experience of many of the contributors of this volume, a number of whom are either colleagues or students of Shulman.

We have emphasized the translations from Sanskrit and the languages of south India, primarily Tamil and Telugu, where Shulman is most at home, and on which he has published a great deal. But another aspect that enriches his abilities as a writer and a translator is his formidable command of other languages and

literatures. His literary expertise includes Ancient Greek and Latin, Persian and Arabic, French and German, Russian and Yiddish, and, more recently, Malayalam, Kannada, and Old Javanese. This rare range partly makes him the sensitive reader and translator that he is.

Shulman's range as a scholar and as a translator overlaps with his lifelong willingness to put himself in the position of a student and to allow himself the pleasures of learning from someone else. It is thus fitting that this volume ends with an afterword by Wendy Doniger, Shulman's teacher at the University of London, who reminds us that David Shulman's persona as student and teacher cannot be separated. Doniger describes some of the things that she has learned from Shulman, and also describes his sharing of his generosity as a student, colleague, and friend.

As Shulman has taught all of us, in literature as in life, the principle of sharing and the principle of pleasure go hand in hand. The present volume is evidence of this lesson, and it is our hope that through it, the combination of both principles extends itself into new lives and new worlds.