CROSSING BOUNDARIES. TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCES IN INDIAN LITERATURE AND ART

International Seminar on Indian Literature and Art

Abstracts

Friday, 23 September (Jagiellonian Library, conference hall, Al. Mickiewicza 22)

Session III

Anna Trynkowska, Warsaw University, Poland

The Metaphor of Boundary Crossing in Classical Sanskrit Literature

"Crossing boundaries" in the topic of the seminar may be understood literally; therefore, the participants may devote their papers to the representation of travels, commerce, military campaigns, etc, in Indian literature and art, as suggested by the organizers themselves. Metaphorical interpretations of the expression are possible as well; thus, papers on various non-physical boundary transgressions, as represented in Indian literature and art, can also be expected. My paper will take yet another approach and deal with the powerful metaphor of boundary crossing in its own right. I will search for instances of its usage in Classical Sanskrit literature, which is my special field of research; when found, they will be analysed in detail in their context.

Klara Gönc Moačanin, Zagreb University, Croatia

Crossing boundaries and transforming experiences in kāvya literature

Some boundaries can never be crossed but boundaries in literature seem to be like no boundaries at all, whether in geographical, mythological, literary, literally sense.

Some of examples found in *kāvya* literature can be seen in Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśakuntalā* vs. Śakuntalā in the *Mahābhārata*, in his *Vikramorvaśīya* vs. Purūravas and Urvaśī in RV 10, 95.

In *kathā* literature geographical hindrances are easily crossed as in Daṇḍin's *Daśakumāracarita* and also in Subandhu's *Vāsavadattā*. In Bāṇa's *Kādambarī* crossing the boundaries happens through different reincarnations of his characters in space and time.

Kāvya authors by evoking mythological and epic figures, alluding on earlier works, using sometimes motifs, themes, citations, often did cross boundaries and have created new experiences by transforming them.

Hermina Cielas, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland

Pushing mind to the limits. Visual forms in Dharmadāsa's "Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana"

People have always tried to master memorizing – a factor playing an immense role in the circulation of Indian literature. They have been creating new memory techniques, aiming at sharpening their minds. To commit to memory seemed to be one of the characteristics of educated people. It was the source of knowledge and respect.

Literary riddles were a great tool for shaping and sharpening the mind. As multi-leveled exercises they engage different parts of the brain in the process of memorizing. It is the entertainment for intelligent and learned people. As the title of Dharmadāsa's work (ca. 11th century) suggests – *An Ornament of the Wise Man's Mouth*. *Bandha*s, visual forms included in *Vidadghamukhamaṇḍana* combined with other literary riddles create complex enigmas, pushing minds of their receivers to the limits and forcing them to unveil multiple layers, denotations and connotations in the text. The readers/listeners stretch their abilities to solve the riddles set by the author who crossed the boundaries of poetical compositions and rules concerning creation of visual forms in Sanskrit literature.

These kinds of forms play an important role in the history and development of Indian visual poetry. Their unique character and function allow to distinguish coherent trend in the tradition of Sanskrit *citrakāvya*.

Renate Söhnen-Thieme, SOAS, University of London, Great Britain

Translating texts into art: specimens from the Jaina tradition

The paper traces different stages in the pictorial representation of Jinas, from possibly pre-textual images (e.g. in Mathurā) to more narrative illustrations in the Citrakalpasūtra (a text that combines the narratives about the Jinas and the corresponding images); it dwells also on some frequently presented topics, such as the fourteen auspicious dreams of a Jina's recently pregnant mother or the pulling out of his hair of a Jina who enters the life of a monk.
As more recent specimen of the presentation of Jinas, I shall be presenting some illustrations of a rather late text praising the 24 Jinas, an illuminated version of the Bhūpālastotra, showing the efforts made to translate parts of the eulogies into the visual medium.

Session IV

Danuta Stasik, Warsaw University, Poland:

A (Thin) Boundary Not To Be Crossed, or Lakṣmaṇ Rekhā

Boundaries (in the sense of 'symbolic boundaries') play different roles in the human world but one of their most basic and at the same time most important function is to delineate the known, familiar, safe and permissible from the unknown, unfamiliar, dangerous, impermissible. They help individuals and whole societies to structure and regulate the universe they live in (on the micro- and macro-scale), they may also be constricting.

In present day India, this structuring and regulating (but not only) aspect of boundaries can be very promisingly studied on an example of the concept of *lakṣmaṇ rekhā*. This idea, originating in the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, functions as a metaphorical expression denoting a strict (moral) boundary that should not be crossed, as its transgression inevitably exposes one to danger. *Lakṣmaṇ rekhā*, among other things, forms an important element of the discourse on female chastity but is very much present in different socio-political contexts, in commercial films as well as in works of art, etc.

In my paper, first I discuss textual evidence that can be found in Hindi *Rāmāyaṇa*s, e.g. in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Rāmcandrikā* or *Rādheśyām Rāmāyaṇ*. This analysis of literary material is meant to contextualize various levels of explicit and implicit meanings of the concept of *lakṣmaṇ rekhā* that emerge from traditional sources in Hindi. In the second part of my presentation, I offer an analysis of entries in representative Hindi dictionaries and then I focus on modern non-literary usages of *lakṣmaṇ rekhā*. I hope that this study can contribute to our understanding of how in contemporary Indian society safety is being negotiated by way of drawing (thin, ethical) boundaries and what happens if they are compromised.

Piotr Borek, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland

"Un récit d'événements vrais". Transforming an Indian literary genre into history with a Western methodology

Rītigranth (or the handbook of poetics) is a literary genre that gained enormous popularity among the litterateurs of the early modern regional courts in North India and sometimes in Deccan. For a historian of Western literatures, the notion used for the translation of the term, i.e. handbook of poetics, and the structure of such texts may limit their function to the didactic purpose. For someone unfamiliar with the Indian traditions, the fact that *rītigranth*'s functions did not have to deal with instructing, may be a question of crossing conceptual boundaries. This genre was often and purposefully used as a vehicle of history. One may justify that those texts were historical since their inception with the argument that history is being written in the leading genre of the époque (cf. Rao, Shulman, Subrahmaniam), which *rītigranth* certainly was at some point. However, the post-modernist methodologies of literature (that arose primarily from the analyses of the European texts) also provide the adequate tools to acknowledge to the authors of the *rītigranth*s the right to be called historians of their times.

Though as a starting point I will take Hayden White's theory of what makes sense of the history, my main argumentation will refer to the claims of the new historicism (eg. Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose) and to several useful reflections by Paul Veyne.

Monika Browarczyk, University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań, Poland

Prabha Khaitan and Her Travels in 'Outer' and 'Inner' Worlds

Prabha Khaitan was a woman of many talents; amongst others she was a prolific writer, a proficient and successful businesswoman, and a dedicated feminist. In her autobiography she shares her memories of many international travels, including her one-year stay in the USA. The paper focuses on how she narrates these experiences and links them with the story of her life.

Session V

Sabrina Ciolfi, Milan University, Italy

Fair and lovely. Transforming standards of female beauty in Indian cinema

Beauty pageants, plastic surgery, fitness workouts and diet secrets, whitening creams... Indian cinema industry is becoming more and more obsessed with physical beauty. The standards of beauty, especially female beauty, are drastically changing. The paper is aimed to examine the transforming ideal of female beauty in Indian cinema and its impact on the lives of ordinary women in India.

Jakub Wilanowski-Hilchen, Warsaw University, Poland:

Going Mad. Preliminary Remarks on Crossing the Threshold into Insanity in Anvar Sajjād's Novel "Kh̬wushiyõ kā bāgh"

Dr Anvar Sajjād (b. 1935) is a Pakistani Urdu writer, playwright, columnist, *kaṭhak* dancer and physician. In 1989, in recognition of his literary achievements, he received the *Pride of Performance*, the award of the Pakistani government. His novel *Kh̬wushiyõ kā bāgh* (*Garden of* [*Earthly*] *Delights*, titled after the painting of Hieronymus Bosch), was published in 1996.
Set in late 20th century Karachi, the novel describes the gradual descent into madness of its middle-class, white-collar protagonist. In its course, it examines the fluid boundaries between the concepts of objective and subjective experience, reason and unreason, sanity and psychosis.
The paper attempts to trace the representations of the crossings of such boundaries in the novel. It also tries to shed light on how abnormality is defined against the norms of society, and to what extent the traditional views that see madness as either a form a privileged access to the divine or a (literary) metaphor for social dissidence, are applicable in the novel's case. Moreover, employing elements of Foucauldian framework, the paper will also interrogate the novel's own attempt to cross into the lifeworld of a madman: How does a formalised cultural narrative such as novel communicate with a radically different subjectivity? And what is the writer's claim to represent the discourse of a madman, and what can it tell us about the relation between literature, society and madness?

Martin Hříbek, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic

Crossing boundaries and transforming experiences in Nabarun Bhattacharya's fiction

Nabarun Bhattacharya (1948-2014) is one of the most powerful Bengali authors of the post Cold-War era. It well may not be an overstatement to say that he is yet another Bengali author who is gradually being recognised (albeit posthumously) as a world literature classic. Apart from selected short stories and poems his first novel *Hārbārṭ* (1993) has been translated into English already twice and recently into German. Second widely read novel by Nabarun, *Kāṅāl mālsāṭ* (War Cry of Beggars, 2003), is not yet available to non-Bengali readership. Both novels, however, inspired successful feature films by Suman Mukhopadhyay. Influenced by magical realism and anarchist thought, *Kāṅāl mālsāṭ* tells a story of a subaltern revolutionary coup. Its agents are *fyātāṛu*s, an imaginary class of marginal human beings who can fly, and *coktār*s, a black magic sect, along with some other supernatural creatures. Crossing

boundaries between extreme realism in depictions of decadence and material decay on one side and fantastic ontologies behind the transformative powers of the social realm on the other side is a characteristic feature of Nabarun's prose as much as is his trademark black humour and social satire. His characters both occupy and re/produce the space in between the dead and alive. In this presentation I will look at how crossing such boundaries and producing hybridity enable transforming experiences in Nabarun Bhattacharya's fiction.

Session VI

Alexander Dubyanskiy, Moscow State University Russia

Transformation in the lives of Tamil Shaiva bhaktas

The Tamil Hindu religious tradition knows many figures who by means of their profound devotion to Shiva, by their deeds had achieved the status of saints (nayanar). The stories of 63 such saints were collected and poetically presented by Cekkilar in the composition called Periya Puranam (12 c.). The stories give many patterns and ways of devotional behaviour but at the same time demonstrate a model of a bhakta's life which is characterized by a number of persistent features. The main point of this model can be defined as a crossing of a certain boundary within the course of life and the transformation of a person into a saint. They can be realized in many ways, by different events and circumstances but their inner meaning is always the same – the call and the choice of Shiva. That is why the boundary which is a devotee has to cross is marked by Shiva's appearance (in person, though usually in disguise, or in the form of his substitutes).

The transformation which ensues the encounter with Shiva is first of all of a spiritual nature but is often accompanied by some outer changes in the devotee's life (a confessional change, a change in family life, bodily transformations, the appearance of a poetic skill etc.). All these events are illustrated in the paper by stories of famous nayanar (Karaikkal Ammeiyar, Appar, Tirumular, Kannappan and others).

Jacek Woźniak, Warsaw University, Poland:

Lords of the Lord. Crossing Boundaries between Human and Divine in Tamil Vaiṣṇava Bhakti Poetry

In Tamil Bhakti tradition the devotees (or the human souls) are generally referred to as 'servants / slaves [of God]', and this slave attitude is one of the main characteristics of their relation with God, their Lord.

However, in the works of *āḻvār*s, a group of twelve Tamil Vaiṣṇava poet-saints from the early Medieval period, one can find a few examples of a rather unusual situation, in which the devotees (or the human souls) are presented not as slaves of the God, but actually as His rulers. Thus, exercising their authority over the God can be understood as a peculiar way of crossing traditionally recognized boundaries that exist between these two different realms (soul vs. God / human vs. divine).

The present paper deals with such crossings in which the poet / the devotee / the soul becomes the God's Lord or simply he can exercise some power over Him, making the God dependent on the human actions. The discussion is based on the poetical fragments in which the *āḻvār*s sing about: devouring and drinking

the God, blackmailing Him, possessing Him, having sex with Him, parental feelings felt towards Him, enshrining Him in a place, etc. All these acts are supposed to be primarily the expressions of human love and the irresistible need to unite with the Lord, which eventually results in taking control over Him.

Simona Leva Jandova, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic

Kuṟavañci: from Temple to Theatre

Kuṟavañci is a genre of Tamil literature written within the framework of the well-established hyper-genre of prabandhas positioned at the crossroad of high and folk tradition. The texts of kuṟavañcis served as librettoes for night-long dance performances enacted by devadasis, the temple dancers and courtesans, during important festivals in many Hindu temples in southern India. These performances dwindled in the 19th century mainly due to the decline od the status of the devadasi institution and general disregard of their art. While over 100 kuṟavañcis were preserved in the textual form, only a handful of them remained part of the living repertoir. The dance of devadasis was revived by social elites during the first decades of the 20th century and transformed into a classical dance of India known under the name of Bharatanatyam which soon reached new height of popularity. The performances of kuṟavañcis were also revived. They were taken from the original temple ritual setting and altered to fit the new urban audience and the context the modern theatre stage. In this paper I will examine several aspects that mark the transition of kuṟavañcis.

Sona Bendikova, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic

The Kotas: From a „Primitive" Tribe to the Modern Social Networks Users

The Kotas, listed under the Indian Constitution as a scheduled tribe, are numbering around 2000 people. They reside in the Nilgiri Mountains, Tamil Nadu. Historically, they have been one of the 20 tribal groups forming the economic, social and cultural diversity of the region. All Nilgiri scheduled tribes belong to a sub-group of particularly vulnerable tribal groups, formerly also named as "primitive tribal groups". This pejorative and politically incorrect term is used even nowadays in the media and in Indian academic and political spheres. This term generally means extreme backwardness and extreme underdevelopment.

Nowadays, emancipation and a self-awareness of some tribal groups bring many changes in their perception of the term "primitive". These groups organize meetings and write letters to political organisations in protest against the use of the term, which slowly becomes a political issue.

The Kotas themselves preserve their "tribeness" and "Kotaness", they still organize traditional festivals and ceremonies, worship their gods and maintain their exogamous social system. Over many decades of changes in the Nilgiris, the Kotas became one of the wealthiest and most educated tribal groups in the region. Hand in hand with it the modernisation came. Nowadays, Many Kotas have education from prestigious Indian universities, they have good job positions and they live not only in the cities near their original villages but also in metropolises. To maintain contact with their relatives and friends, they have started using modern devices and applications like Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, LinkedIn, etc.

In this paper, I would like to present how the use of social networks helps the Kotas preserve their "tribal" contacts and the "tribal" togetherness. With their permission, I would like to show examples of their posts that prove their strong sense of tribalness and their pride.