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***The Guide* and *My Dateless Diary***

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**Abstract**

Raju’s performance as (and supposed transformation into) a holy man is only one of numerous other performances depicted in R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide* (1958). These range from self-reflexive role-playing to direct engagements with theatrical and cinematic practices. Tracing the thematic significance of *The Guide*’s various performances, this article then turns to consider how Narayan develops the theme in a later and mostly neglected text, *My Dateless Diary: An American Journey* (1960), an autobiographical narrative depicting Narayan’s sojourn in the US in 1956–1957, during which he wrote *The Guide*. Reading *My Dateless Diary* alongside *The Guide* exposes an array of subtle links between the two texts. The article demonstrates that Narayan’s travels in the US allow him to refine his playful awareness of the performance of the self, both as a component of the plot (in the novel) and as a characteristic of the authorial persona (in the travel account) who is gradually transformed into a reluctant guru, just like the fictional Raju.

**Keywords**

Indian novel in English, R. K. Narayan, performance, theatre, travel writing

Sometime in early 2019, a bootleg copy of the English-speaking film *The Guide* (1965), starring Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman, surfaced on the internet, “proving that cinephiles have the passion and imagination that studio executives lack”, as *Scroll*’s reviewer noted (Ramnath, 2019: n.p.). Produced almost concurrently with the well-known Hindi film, *Guide*, featuring the same stars and released in the same year, the English cinematic adaptation of R. K. Narayan’s celebrated novel was written by Pearl S. Buck

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and directed by Tad Danielewski. However, unlike the successful Hindi version (written and directed by Vijay Anand), which swiftly became a milestone in the history of Indian commercial cinema, the English film received lukewarm reviews, was withdrawn from cinemas, and was rarely seen since — that is, until its recent YouTube reincarnation.1

The novel’s double cinematic afterlife can be seen as a metatextual manifestation of *The Guide* itself, which is split between the Indian (setting/theme) and the English (nar-rative). To be sure, this split characterizes not only Narayan’s oeuvre but the entire cor-pus of Indian writing in English. It is telling, however, that *The Guide* has spurred an unusual number of adaptations, both in India and in the West. In addition to the films, a theatrical version was staged in Oxford in 1961 and, slightly revised, on Broadway in 1968 (Ahluwalia, 1982).2 This may well be related, I would argue, to the novel’s fascina-tion with modes of performance, which lend themselves to further adaptations in various media. Indeed, Vijay Mishra’s insightful analysis of the Hindi film *Guide* in his *Bollywood* *Cinema: Temples of Desire* demonstrates how the film appropriates the novel’s notionsof selfhood — in themselves a remarkably condensed reworking of the “Hindu metanar-rative of selfhood and dharma” (2002: 44) — in order to present *Guide*’s star, Dev Anand, as an enlightened being: “The ironic undercutting that marks the Raju of Narayan’s novel is replaced by the star’s attempt to redefine and rework his own history” (2002: 48). As explained below, rather than explore the affinities between the novel’s playful preoccu-pation with performances and its cinematic or theatrical adaptations, the present article considers how this preoccupation reemerges in Narayan’s own subsequent writings.

The novel’s interest in role-playing and in performances has been traced by John Thieme, in his discussion of *The Guide*’s double narrative. In the novel, the events that begin with Raju’s release from prison and lead up to his “canonization” and fasting are described by an omniscient third-person narrator; while Raju’s earlier experiences, end-ing with his imprisonment, are depicted in Raju’s own first-person account, as narrated to the villager, Velan. Pointing out that “there are more extensive connections between the two narratives than have generally been noticed”, Thieme observes that both strands “suggest the performative nature of personality”: “Raju’s supposed transformation into a ‘saint’ [...] can be seen as a logical extension of everything that has preceded it, the final stage in his serial adoption of a range of personae” (2007: 107–108).

Employing Thieme’s valuable observation as a point of departure, my own reading situates Raju’s “transformation” within a broader array of performances depicted in the novel. These range from self-reflexive role-playing and presentations of the self, through various modes of social and cultural performance, to direct engagements with theatrical and cinematic genres and practices. An immense body of scholarship in recent decades has examined the genealogies of the “performative turn” in the humanities and social sciences, leading to the creation of that highly intricate (and, indeed, extremely fluid) discipline known as performance studies.3 Reading Narayan’s *The Guide* in this context, my discussion hinges on the sociological approach, tracing how theatrical vocabularies and dramaturgical paradigms are relevant to an understanding of daily social interactions (Carlson, 2013/1996: 31–55). The reverse is also true: at the same time that sociologists such as Erving Goffman were looking to the theatre for a framework with which to inter-pret non-theatrical behaviour, scholars in the humanities turned to social theories to help analyse theatrical and literary events (Bial, 2004: 57). The result has been a growing

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awareness of the multifaceted roles played by “performances” in a broad spectrum of human activities, ranging from the art of self-presentation to the performing arts. As this article seeks to show, Narayan’s novel — tracing Raju’s role-playing as travel guide, impresario, and guru — offers a remarkably rich literary exploration of this spectrum.

Demonstrating how this array of interrelated performances is employed and played out in *The Guide* itself, the article then goes on to consider how it figures in other texts that have emanated from the novel. The most well-known of these texts is undoubtedly a short essay called “Reluctant Guru” (1974), in which Narayan explains how the encounter with the academic culture of the late 1960s United States made him feel “in the same situation as Raju, the hero of my *Guide* who was mistaken for a saint and began to wonder at some point himself if a sudden effulgence had begun to show in his face” (1988/1974: 104–105).4 However, as this article demonstrates, Narayan’s transformation into “Guru” — as the climatic episode in an intricate series of performances — already figures in an earlier and mostly neglected text, *My Dateless Diary: An American Journey* (1960). In this autobiographical travel account, Narayan describes the events surround-ing the composition of *The Guide* during his sojourn in the US in 1956–1957.5

The timeframe is telling: the decade or so stretching between the publication of *The* *Guide* (1958) and the Broadway production of the play (1968) witnessed not onlyAmericans’ growing interest in India (both epitomized and reinforced by Jacqueline Kennedy’s visit to India in 1962 [Burton, 2007: 93–94]) but also Narayan’s own immer-sion in American culture, and — no less significant for the present discussion — the emergence of the aforementioned sociological interest in dramaturgical tropes. Erving Goffman’s pioneering *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* was first published in 1956, just as Narayan was writing *The Guide*, a novel that explores the links between “the performative aspects of identity” and “performance arts” (Thieme, 2007: 111). While it would be farfetched to suggest that the sociological academic interest in perfor-mance had somehow seeped into Narayan’s novel, there is little doubt that his extended tour of the US allowed Narayan to combine his lifelong interest in theatre, dance, and cinema with his growing novelistic awareness of the performance of the self, whether as a component of the plot or as feature of the authorial presence.6

Tracing these multiple performances, then — first in *The Guide*, then in the travel account which depicts the writing of the novel — this article draws attention to *My* *Dateless Diary* as a particularly vivid example of what Geoffrey Kain has called “R. K.Narayan’s performance of Narayan”: namely, “the author’s playful self-awareness, his willing and coy performance of his own crafted persona” (2002: 6). Whereas Kain focuses on the author’s 14 novels (and on *Talkative Man* specifically), it is the docu-mentary, nonfictional mode of *My Dateless Diary* which allows Narayan to run the performance’s full gamut, as it were. This is due to the fact that Narayan can speak about his authorial persona explicitly; but also because his American journey is shaped by his fascination with the stage, the film industry, and celebrity. When Kain notes that “Narayan eventually performs Narayan in the way that Humphrey Bogart came to play Bogart, or James Stewart came to understand what it meant to play Jimmy Stewart”, he is employing the actors’ cinematic performance as an “analogy” (Kain’s own term) to the construction of the novelistic voice (2002: 7). Yet *My Dateless Diary*, as this article demonstrates, is often explicitly concerned with the nature of role-acting, performance,

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and celebrity — epitomized most playfully, as we shall see, in Narayan’s encounter with the legendary Greta Garbo.

**Dharma and drama: Multiple performances in *The Guide***

“Raju welcomed the intrusion” (Narayan, 2006/1958: 1):7 like numerous theatrical dra-mas, *The Guide* begins with an entrance. Sitting cross-legged beside an ancient shrine, the recently released convict Raju is approached by a villager, Velan, who mistakes him for a holy man. Now, with the presence of an audience, a spectator “gazing on his face”, Raju feels “like an actor who was always expected to utter the right sentence” (9). Indeed, narrated by the third-person omniscient narrator but focalized through Raju’s eyes, the account of a man “suffering enforced sainthood” — as Narayan defined it in his autobi-ography, *My Days* (2001/1973: 161) — is informed, repeatedly and consistently, by prac-tices and vocabularies borrowed from the world of the theatre.

Keen to enhance the dramaturgical effect of his performance as guru, Raju decides “to arrange the stage for the display with more thoroughness” (25), transferring his seat to the inner hall of the temple. When the villagers gaze at him with admiration, Raju feels “like an actor who had come on the stage, and, while the audience waited, had no lines to utter or gestures to make” (37). Indeed, realizing that he is trapped — “I have to play the part expected of me; there is no escape” (37) — Raju suspects “that his spiritual status would be enhanced if he grew a beard and long hair to fall on his nape. [...] He bore the various stages of his make-up with fortitude” (39). Supplementing the physical guise, Raju uses cryptic spiritual statements and cliched proverbs to complete his performance.

The ambiguity that lies at the heart of *The Guide*, which reaches its zenith in the novel’s open ending (Thieme, 2007: 104–105), is rooted in the inability to determine whether Raju’s acting and his intricate use of sets, makeup, and inspirational cliches do actually lead, ultimately, to a real spiritual transformation.8 The novel’s multiple use of the verb “to perform”, with its diverse definitions, draws attention to the difficulty of assessing Raju’s mindset. Raju, for example, instructs the villagers that “[o]ne who serves the performer of a sacrifice derives the same merit” (84). Meanwhile Velan explains that, to stop the draught, the holy man is expected to stand in knee-deep water, pray, and fast: the rains would then come down, “provided the man who performed it was a pure soul, was a great soul” (84). Building on the theatrical dimensions (as well as historical origins) of religious rites, formulations like these underscore the challenge of establishing the exact nature of Raju’s “performance” as guru.

At the same time, altering between the two narratives — the third-person account of Raju’s interaction with the villagers and his first-person confessional recollection of his earlier life — the novel gradually constructs a series of parallels between Raju’s perfor-mance as holy man and his earlier work in Malgudi’s tourist industry. Carefully staged and choreographed, combining improvisation with well-rehearsed scripts — “I hardly paid attention to what they [the sightseers] said”, Raju notes: “I knew all their lines in advance” (107) — it is Raju’s career as “Railway Raju”, the tourist guide, that prepares him for his new role as spiritual guide. Indeed, some of the novel’s central thematic con-cerns pivot on the shared performative/theatrical elements that link these two modes of “guiding” — two roles which Raju takes up and internalizes.

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In addition to his dual performance as tourist guide and spiritual guide, Raju is involved in a third and equally decisive task involving performative elements: his career as Rosie’s impresario and artistic guide. To be sure, Rosie’s success as a great classical dancer provides *The Guide* with its most literal and straightforward depiction of the stage. Raju’s suggestion that the Albert Mission refreshes the programme for its annual social — “Why not a dance recital instead of the usual Shakespeare tragedy?” (139) — indicates how the novel employs the classical south Indian dance form, *Bharatanatyam*, to probe the tension (or, perhaps, the affinity) between East and West, but also between dance and drama.9 It is by depicting the dance recitals that the novel traces and describes virtually every aspect of the performing arts: composition, rehearsal, design (of set, cos-tumes, and lights), marketing, venue location, spectatorship, celebrity, routine, fatigue, and so forth.

Yet beyond the fascination with the artistic and logistical details that make up the staged performance (down to the comfortable sofas and invitations required for distin-guished guests), the novel is concerned much more broadly with the multifaceted nature of the performance, spilling from the stage — offstage. To convince the Albert Mission officials to engage Rosie’s classical dance, Raju and Rosie stage an elaborate meta-per-formance in Raju’s humble abode. Masquerading as Raju’s cousin, Rosie (now named Nalini) strives to create “an effect of simplicity produced with a lot of preparation”. Raju himself dresses “soberly for the part” of promoter (including props like rimless glasses), explicating the performance so elaborately that he virtually becomes the performer: “I described ‘The Dancing Feet’ and explained its significance word by word and almost performed the dance act myself” (139–40). And so, even before she actually dances for the visitors — and long before she takes to the stage — Raju and Rosie revel in the per-formance of a pre-performance, as it were: “I walked through the kitchen curtain and she was standing there. I grinned at her and winked at her. She stood stock still and grinned back at me. We were enjoying this piece of stage-management; we felt we had already begun to put on a show” (140).

The novel’s detailed description of the showbiz world suggests how theatrical tropes continue to shape the couple’s life even after the formal conclusion of a recital. For Raju, this means taking up even more roles. As he nurtures — indeed, guides — Rosie’s growth as a performer, Raju seems to function all at once as awed spectator, “art critic” (128), “teacher”, and “a dancer’s backstage boy” (132). His tendency, already mentioned above, to move from elucidation to demonstration ultimately conflates one role (impresario) with another (performer): “Gradually I began to say, not ‘I am going to Trichy for a perfor-mance by Nalini,’ but ‘I am performing at Trichy on Sunday, on Monday I have a program

. . .’ and then, ‘I can dance in your place only on . . .’” (152). Rosie, in turn, tired of the routine, dreams of becoming a spectator and taking “a seat in the auditorium” (153).

Even after his arrest and fall, Raju’s fate is still shaped by modes of performance, in diverse media. Raju’s lawyer, who has “his own star value”, undertakes the case “as a concession from one star to another — for Nalini’s sake” (177). Small wonder that he presents Raju’s case in court “as a sort of comedy in three acts” (178). Depicting the busy marketplace and festival that evolve around Raju’s fast, the final chapter of *The Guide* extends the novel’s interest in various modes of performance, moving from the perform-ing arts to cinema and television. The crowds flock to see Health Department films about

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malaria and “Government of India films about dams, river valleys, and various projects” (190), but also “an Ali Baba film” (191). Amid the many press reporters that cover Raju’s fast, the “busiest man” is James J. Malone, a Californian producer of “films and TV shows” who is keen to “shoot this subject” (192). Malone’s use of camera, sound, and light equipment is described in detail, emphasizing the logistical work behind the cine-matic representation — specifically in the context of American popular culture.

Significantly, Malone’s exchanges with Raju (an initial conversation, followed by a filmed interview) call attention to the politics of language that shape Indian Anglophone literature. When Malone asks whether he can speak to Raju in English, the reassuring response (“Yes. He knows English” [192]) exposes Narayan’s otherwise transparent use of English to stand for, and sometimes mimic, the local Tamil.10 Uncovering the slippery status of English in the novel, the scene calls up Raju’s previous performance as tourist guide (interestingly, the novel is silent when it comes to Railway Raju’s use of English); it also, however, reframes and replicates Raju’s performance as guru, which is now cap-tured on Malone’s film.11 Malone is shooting a popular documentary about an exotic Indian ritual — but what, exactly, is he documenting? What kind of performance is ulti-mately offered here by the “performer of a sacrifice”?

Significantly, while the novel softly mocks the American entertainment industry and its flirt with the spiritual charm of the Oriental swami, Malone’s presence also denotes the novel’s own intricate involvement with its English-speaking readership. Indeed, Malone can be seen “as a surrogate for potential American readers of the novel” (Thieme, 2007: 106). *The Guide*, moreover, employs Malone’s cinematic work in order to expand the nov-el’s interest in various modes of performance, whether in different geographical/cultural contexts, languages, or range of media. By the end of the novel, these range from everyday performances of the self to staged recitals; and from ancient Indian dance to contemporary American popular culture. As we shall now see, this interest also spills over from the novel to the process of its creation, as described by Narayan himself later on.

**Super-Guides in America: Authorship and/as performance in *My Dateless Diary***

The references to American popular culture in *The Guide* become more conspicuous when we remember that Narayan wrote the novel during his 1956–1957 stay in the US as a Rockefeller Foundation fellow. “At this time I had been thinking of a subject for a novel: a novel about someone suffering enforced sainthood”, wrote Narayan in his auto-biography, *My Days*: “During my travels in America, the idea crystallized in my mind. I stopped in Berkeley for three months, took a hotel room, and wrote my novel” (2001/1973: 160–61). Naturally, this extra-textual detail raises speculation regarding the possible affinity between the novel and the circumstances of its composition. Yet when asked, in an interview in 1983, whether there was anything in *The Guide* “that was transformed out of the American experience”, Narayan is quick to reject that option: “I don’t think so. It is totally Indian. In the film and on stage and in a Broadway show they spoiled the whole thing. It is native to this soil. I couldn’t dare to write about America — only American writers can write wide geographical novels” (qtd. in Lowe, 1993: 181).

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Narayan’s response is noteworthy for several reasons. First, *The Guide* may be “totally Indian”, but Malone’s presence in the final chapter brings in (as noted above) an une-quivocally American element, which could be said to reflect Americans’ fascination with the mysticism of Hindu culture. This fascination would become instrumental in bringing the novel to the screen and to the stage — adaptations that instantly become the focus of Narayan’s rather tetchy response to the interviewer. These cinematic and theatrical per-formances may have “spoiled the whole thing” but they are also intrinsic, as we have just seen, to *The Guide*’s thematic concerns. To paraphrase Narayan, these performances are “native” to the novel’s “soil”.

Moreover, although Narayan’s claim that he “couldn’t dare to write about America” may well be understood in the context of novel-writing (as his final point about American writers seems to indicate), it is impossible to ignore his nonfictional *My Dateless Diary:* *An American Journey* (1960). This book offers an extremely “wide geographical”account of American culture and society, as experienced by Narayan during his fellow-ship year. As my discussion below demonstrates, *My Dateless Diary* not only explores the interchanges between East and West, as encapsulated in the dialogue between Raju and Malone, but also offers a detailed account of how Narayan composed *The Guide*. Although Narayan often presents this creative act as a mysterious process that evades description, *My Dateless Diary* continuously positions the writing of the novel within (and sometimes against) the American cultural landscape, with its array of performances, both theatrical and behavioural.12 In doing so, it also presents the writing of the novel as a performance of sorts.

The author, then, as performer — but also as guru. Remarking on *The Guide*’s Berkeley origins, John Thieme has suggested that, “consciously or unconsciously”, Narayan may have responded in his novel “to the West’s fascination with Hindu mysti-cism, albeit before its enhanced interest in Indian spirituality in the 1960s accorded cult status to figures such as the Mahesh Maharishi Yogi and Indian gurus, whether genuine or charlatans, became ten a penny” (2007: 101). Drawing on *My Dateless Diary* — a remarkable work that has received almost no scholarly attention (including from Thieme)

— I would like to show how Narayan toys, knowingly and gleefully, with these Americanized representations of gurus, while linking them to other modes of perfor-mances and role-playing.

From its very inception, with a chapter entitled “New York Days”, *My Dateless Diary* introduces a multifaceted affinity between Narayan’s own experiences as tourist and *The* *Guide*’s characters, plot, and themes. In an early entry entitled “India Behind Glass”,Narayan describes how, finding himself in front of the Government of India’s shabby tourist office in Manhattan, he himself begins to offer travel advice to a bystander, paint-ing a vivid picture of the elephants in Mysore’s jungles: “It sounds so romantic that I am myself impressed by it” (1988/1960: 17).13 Although Raju is not mentioned at this stage, readers familiar with the novel will immediately identify the image of the Indian guide, persuaded by the power of his own fictions. That Narayan is employing the novel to describe events that occurred well before the composition of the novel merely enhances the playfulness.

The allusion to Raju becomes explicit a few pages later, when Narayan describes his visit to NBC studios at Rockefeller Center, whisked around by a “Super-Guide” (31):

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The guide’s smartness, kindliness, elaborate speech and ready wit got on my nerves because it was so well-practised; his smooth speech, I suddenly realised, took the place of the actual exhibits; after walking along endless corridors and up and down flight of steps, one realised that one had finally seen only charts and dummies and heard the guide’s lectures on the technicalities of television. He reminded me of the chief character in my new novel, — a tourist guide who conjured history and archeology out of thin air. I suddenly recollected the amusing sight of visitors streaming along the gardens of Gemini Studio in Madras behind a Public Relations Officer. “This is the cutting room, that is the laboratory,” he would say indicating the exteriors of various sections, never showing them anything really, while the crowd followed patiently, hoping till the last second to get a peep at a star or a scene being shot. (32)

Here, as in the first anecdote, it is not quite clear whether Narayan’s adventures in New York would go on to shape the writing of *The Guide* — or whether it is the novel that would shape the composition of the travel account.

Read in tandem, these two anecdotes capture some of the main features of *My Dateless* *Diary: An American Journey*: a conscious blurring of art and reality; an associative leapfrom the US context to the Indian one; and an avid interest in different kinds of perfor-mance, reflected here in the elastic shift between television (NBC), film (Gemini Studio)14 and theatre: Narayan’s visit to NBC studies, he explains, is organized by “Miss Roser of Anta (American National Theatre and Academy)”, whom he meets at her Broadway office, “surrounded with masks and costumes” (32). The encounter with Miss Roser, who introduces Narayan as “a distinguished gentleman from India who has come on a Rockefeller to study the theatre movement in this country” (33), could be said to prompt the movement that would conclude, 12 years later, with the Broadway premiere of *The Guide*.

Most intriguing, however, are the various parallels, both explicit and implicit, that emerge between Narayan’s fictional Super-Guide (namely, Raju) and Narayan himself. These parallels — already hinted at in the scene outside the Government of India’s tour-ist office in Manhattan, when Narayan praises Mysore’s elephants — become increas-ingly visible as Narayan turns to describe how he composed *The Guide*. The writing begins mid-way into the American journey — and, accordingly, mid-way into *My* *Dateless Diary* — once Narayan, after much deliberation, settles in Berkeley’s HotelCarlton: “I have got into the routine of writing — about one thousand five hundred to two thousand words a day anyhow. I have the whole picture ready in my mind, except some detail here and there and the only question is to put it in type” (99).15 Significantly, like the guides in both the NBC and Gemini studios — indeed, like the “chief character” in the novel being written — Narayan now employs his own smartness, kindliness, elabo-rate speech, and ready wit to describe to his readers the external technicalities of writing, the routine, and the writing quotas (which resemble the “cutting room” and “labora-tory”), while refusing to disclose additional details concerning the actual creative pro-cess, and thus “never showing them anything really”. Conjuring “history and archeology out of thin air”, Narayan’s account of his authorship is as illusory as the Super-Guide’s deft performance.

Still, the emphasis on the technicalities of composition impel Narayan to situate his writing “laboratory” within the American setting. Struggling to complete his daily quota, the author must overcome the numerous temptations and hardships represented by

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American culture. Here, as before, a careful reading of *My Dateless Diary* alongside *The* *Guide* exposes an array of subtle thematic links between the two texts. For example,endeavouring to adhere to his vegetarian Indian diet amidst Berkeley’s gastronomic limi-tations (these are still, after all, the mid-1950s), Narayan’s meticulous descriptions of his daily nutritional struggles can shed new light on Raju’s culinary experiences. Raju’s grati-fication — receiving a flow of free, delicious cooked dishes from the villagers — reflects a fantasy of being nourished; while the pangs of hunger during Raju’s fast can be read as an extreme expression of the novelist’s culinary cravings.16 Similarly, Narayan’s descrip-tions of his writing routine suggest a direct link between *The Guide*’s depiction of the television producer, Malone, and the incentives driving Narayan’s work ethic:

I’ve become a Television addict. Every evening I rush through my quota of writing and prepare my dinner in order to go down to the lobby and sit down with half a dozen others and watch the television, which goes on till 11.30 in the night. I have no peace of mind until I know the latest progress of the sixty-four thousand dollar question or seen a full-length film of other days. (104)

**Keeping up the pretence: The author as reader, guru, devotee**

Having completed the first draft of *The Guide*, Narayan leaves Berkeley and resumes his journey across the US — while simultaneously correcting and revising the manuscript. Here, too, *My Dateless Diary: An American Journey* situates the novel in, or against, the American surroundings. However, rather than suggesting how elements of American culture seep into the (now almost completed) novel, the travel account reveals how Narayan employs the novel as a mechanism of coping with his surroundings. Witnessing, first hand, the realities of racial segregation (“White passengers blink unhappily” when he boards the bus in Tennessee [153]), Narayan spends two hours at Nashville’s airport correcting his novel “in an effort to forget the problems of human complexion” (154). The escapist quality of the novel is accentuated in a later scene, when the train journey from Washington DC to New York offers Narayan an ideal opportunity

to try and read the manuscript of my novel, which I wrote in Berkeley. I try to read it, not as an author, but as a novel-reader who has picked it up for a train journey. Difficult to keep up the pretence — the book being in my long-hand manuscript; still I manage. Well-settled in my parlour seat, I start with the first line of my novel beginning “Raju welcomed the intrusion”, and try to feel curious about further developments. (156)

Taking up the role of reader, “reading for the first time one’s novel” (156), Narayan is engaged here in role-playing, “pretence”, echoing his reaction when he heard himself speaking outside the Government of India’s tourist office (“It sounds so romantic that I am myself impressed by it” [17]). Yet the self-delusion proves a challenging task, since Narayan cannot but notice, “through a corner of my eye” (156), the endless features of the increasingly industrialized American landscape. The incongruity (but also intricate links) between the novel’s Indian setting and the American “soil” on which the train is moving reach a final climax in this section when, passing through Philadelphia, Narayan

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recalls the invitation he received from the University of Pennsylvania’s India Society group to comment on their new courses in Marathi and Gujarati. When Narayan was compelled to confess that he could not speak these languages, “only Tamil and Kannada”, the Society merely reiterated its invitation, leaving Narayan confused and unsure how to proceed (157).

The anecdote captures not only the complexity of India’s linguistic reality, but also the expectations of Narayan’s American readership, and, ultimately, the image of a perplexed man who cannot quite muster the spiritual powers that others insist he has. Little wonder that, embarrassed by the recollection of the entire affair, Narayan decides to “sit back with my novel. Raju is making passes at the archeologist’s wife . . .” (157). As we’ve seen above, this intricate episode — in which Narayan, nervous about being thought of as a “guide”, reinforces his performance as “reader” of *The Guide* — is only one of many such moments in *My Dateless Diary*, which hinge on the encounter between East and West.17

The connection between these different realms — the writing of the novel, the spiritual powers attributed to Narayan, and the array of performances ranging from identity role-playing to “the theatre movement in this country” — reaches its culmination in the final chapter, “New York”, which depicts Narayan’s return, full circle, to Manhattan. In this section, amidst his numerous social engagements and the final work on the manuscript, Narayan focuses on his friendship with the scholar of Japanese theatre, Faubion Bowers (1917–1999) and his then wife, the Indian writer Santha Rama Rau (1923–2009).18 It is through them that Narayan meets Jackie, an aspiring actress from the West Coast: “attempting to work her way on to Broadway, she has to maintain herself by freelance typing work” (170). Having typed Bowers’ “book on The Theatre” (169), Jackie is happy to work closely with Narayan on his own book about modes of performance.

If Narayan’s meeting with “Miss Roser of Anta”, described in the very first chapter, offered one of the earliest associations between Narayan’s composition of the novel and his interest in “the theatre movement in this country” (33), Jackie’s presence in the con-cluding chapter of *My Dateless Diary*, diligently typing the final version of *The Guide*, seals this association, while also presenting a rather bleak picture of thespian life. Until she performs on the stage, the aspiring actress is compelled, for the time being, to type books about performance. Narayan tries to cheer her up “by saying that some day at Broadway I should visit a theatre, see her starred, tell everyone that she typed my novel once, and go back-stage to greet her” (170).

Yet it is Narayan’s acquaintance with Rau’s and Bowers’ more distinguished friend, Greta Garbo, that evokes some of the *Dateless Diary*’s most playful statements about role-playing and celebrity.19 Seeing her for the first time at his friends’ house, Narayan is intrigued by “a lady sitting on a sofa, wearing a grey gown” but cannot guess that this is indeed the great Garbo herself (171). Meeting her again, Naryan notes, “It is fascinating to pretend that I am not aware of the personality of Garbo but that I take her to be a com-monplace woman of New York” (174). Pretending not to notice Garbo’s own pretence, Narayan suppresses his veneration only to be venerated by Garbo. The conversation over lunch, he explains, “is all about religion, mysticism, evolution, and reincarnation”:

G. G. asks, “Why have we been created, why have we been made to suffer, undergo pain, and then, what is the meaning of all this? Why? Why?” Her voice as she says it is rich and modulated

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as if she were speaking the lines in a play. I have to find an answer because evidently she has enough faith in me to think I can give her an answer. I can only view her problem from the point of view of *Karma* and the evolution of a being from birth to birth. [...] She follows my words with the greatest attention [...]. (175)

As they leave, Garbo “brings her palms together in an Indian salute” which she had learnt “[m]any years ago at Hollywood” (176).

Here, as in other episodes in *My Dateless Diary*, Narayan becomes a reluctant guru. This, as mentioned above, would become the title of a later piece, in which he would describe his experiences teaching at a mid-West American university in the late 1960s, when the fascination with Indian lore becomes an obsession among young Americans, especially on campuses: “Whether through *Kama-Sutra* or mysticism, India is very much in everybody’s thoughts, particularly among the American youth”, notes Narayan in “Reluctant Guru” (1988/1974: 103): “The belief in my spiritual adeptness was a factor that could not be easily shaken. I felt myself in the same situation as Raju, the hero of my *Guide* who was mistaken for a saint” (104–05).20Significantly, while this often-quotedessay equates Narayan with Raju explicitly — indeed, even heavy-handedly — the dia-logue with Garbo in *My Dateless Diary* preserves a much more delicate playfulness, rooted in the complex role-playing associated with Garbo’s own range of performances, from her alleged anonymity to the Indian salute borrowed from Hollywood — and, indeed, with Narayan’s own performance as a movie-fan transformed into a guru.

It is only befitting, then, that the penultimate section of *My Dateless Diary*, “Finis”, includes a whirlwind account that links together the novel, theatre, and East–West rela-tions (184–187). It begins with a toast celebrating the handing of *The Guide*’s manuscript (all four copies) to the Viking Press and continues with a Ravi Shankar recital at MoMA, followed by a final encounter with Jackie at the Circle-in-the-Square Theatre. “[U]nrec-ognizable in a resplendent evening gown”, the actress is not performing on stage but rather selling tickets for Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* — working in the theatre, then, but still removed from the stage itself (185). The paragraph ends with a swift list of some of the theatrical productions which Narayan had attended during these final days (*Long Day’s Journey into Night*, *Macbeth*, *Orpheus Descending*), all of them about “per-sonalities who have gone to pieces” (186).

The concluding section of the book, however, is entitled *G. G*.: “Garbo was delighted when I accepted a cigarette from her”, writes Narayan: “and called aloud everyone to watch my performance”. She then takes out “her own diary to show me the entries”. This frisky series of reversals — in which Garbo watches the novelist perform, and produces her own diary to counter his — ends with Garbo’s farewell: “How I wish we could stop time from moving and always taking us on to a moment of parting! Good-bye’” (187). These are the very last words of the book: by concluding *My Dateless Diary* with Garbo’s words of parting, Narayan offers a final performative instance of what Geoffrey Kain calls “Narayan’s performance of Narayan” (2002: 5). But not only Narayan: while these final scenes with Garbo allow the author to function, simultaneously, as both guru and follower, Raju and Velan, they also position us, the readers, in the role of those visitors to Gemini Studio, who follow their talkative super-guide patiently, “hoping till the last second to get a peep at a star” (32).

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**Conclusion: Writing in the rain**

Narayan’s playful decision to end his *Dateless Diary* with Garbo’s farewell is also a fit-ting conclusion for the present article, which has sought to demonstrate how Narayan employs diverse kinds of performances, in various textual layers, in order to tease out, probe and occasionally even problematize a rich array of cultural and geographical ten-sions. As John Thieme has noted, Narayan’s novels, from the very beginning of his career, “bring Western and Hindu — specifically Tamil brahmin — elements together in a variety of ways”, producing fiction that “fuses registers in an act of cultural brokerage that enables it to cross frontiers without losing a sense of Indian specifics, and demon-strates how fluid, fractured and fleeting these specifics can be” (2007: 101–102). While Thieme’s perceptive analysis links this fluidity to *The Guide*’s interest in performances, what has received almost no attention — and what this article has endeavoured to show

— is the ways in which Narayan’s nonfiction develops these tropes, particularly when it comes to constructing the figure of the author as performer. Indeed, a close reading of *My* *Dateless Diary* in conjunction with *The Guide* has exposed a series of subtle connectionsbetween the two texts, revealing how Narayan’s American journey allows him to refine his playful understanding of the performance of the self, whether as central trope in the (novel’s) plot — or as a significant dimension of the authorial persona (in the travel account), who is gradually transformed into a reluctant guru, just like the fictional Raju.

Having focused mainly on *My Dateless Diary*, it is useful, by way of closure, to con-sider the conclusion of yet another nonfictional text, which brings us back to the English-speaking cinematic version of *The Guide*, with which we began. Narayan, who disliked the Hindi film *Guide*, loathed the English version. In a notable essay entitled “Misguided ‘Guide’”, published in *Life* magazine in 1967 and reprinted several times since, Narayan described the crises and blunders that haunted Danielewski’s production. These culmi-nated in two attempts to shoot the final scene of the story, both involving heroic efforts to cope with unexpected storms, rain, and flooding. “This seemed to me an appropriate conclusion for my story, which, after all, was concerned with the subject of rain, and in which Nature, rather than film makers, acted in consonance with the subject”, noted Narayan wryly (overlooking the fact that the novel’s open ending — unlike the films’

— does not specify whether the rains actually come). Characteristically, “Misguided ‘Guide’” ends with a personal recollection that carries Narayan back to his first visit to New York, at the very beginning of his Rockefeller fellowship year. Making his way to the offices of the Viking Press, “to sign the contract, before writing *The Guide*, a sudden downpour caught me on Madison Avenue and I entered the Viking Press offices dripping wet. I still treasure a letter from Keith Jennison, who was then my editor. ‘Somehow I will always, from now on’, he wrote, ‘associate the rainiest days in New York with you’” (1988/1974: 217).

As should be evident by now, the anecdote about the heavy Manhattan rain which initiated, so to speak, the writing of the novel, is just one of numerous instances in which Narayan’s self-representation as author of *The Guide* is in itself a mode of performance that builds on, mimics, and reproduces the multiple performances depicted in the novel

— and, indeed, in the novelist’s other texts. It should come as no surprise that the anec-dote is first narrated in the *Dateless Diary* (followed, typically, by a description of Narayan’s lunch with his new editors: “I made no announcement regarding my

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preferences but quietly ordered a vegetable plate” [35]). The repetition of the anecdote in “Misguided ‘Guide’” allows Narayan to juxtapose or equate his own rainy experience with the cinematic experience (in itself a fusion of life and art), and thus to merge the story of the novel’s origins with its filmic afterlives. In this final feat of Narayan’s per-formance of Narayan, the author’s rainfall anticipates — and, indeed, transcends — both Raju’s (imagined?) rain and Dev Anand’s (very real) outpouring.

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**Notes**

* 1. Back in 2007, Dev Anand claimed that he owned the “only known surviving print of the rarely-seen English version”, suggesting that “he may just agree to release it one day for public viewing” (*Hindustan Times*, 2007: n.p.).
* 2. The novel was adapted to the stage by Harvey Breit and Patricia Rinehart. The Oxford pro-duction was successful, but the Broadway version closed down after 12 previews and five performances (Ahluwalia, 1982). A more recent theatrical adaptation was staged in Delhi (Matra, 2012).
* 3. See, among numerous others, Carlson (2013/1996); Bial (2004); Jackson (2004).
* 4. For a discussion of the links between *The Guide* and “The Reluctant Guru” see Paranjape (2003, especially 174–176). On Narayan’s stay at the University of Missouri, which gener-ated the piece, see French with Qazi (1993).
* 5. The MLA Bibliography lists two items on *My Dateless Diary* (contrasted with 51 on *The* *Guide*). While these numbers do not reflect the entire scholarly output, they indicate the text’srelative obscurity. For short, rather descriptive analyses of the *Diary* see Saxena (2006); Dash (2014).
* 6. Narayan’s fascination with other art forms is too complex to be considered here. It is worth mentioning, however, that the R. K. Narayan collection at Boston University’s Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center includes manuscripts of three plays by Narayan that have never been staged: *The Home of Thunder* (briefly mentioned in *My Days* [Narayan, 2001/1973: 105]); *On Everest*; and *Watchman of the Lake* (also published by Indian Thought Publications, 1941; and reprinted in *The Emerald Route* [1977], a tourist-guide to Karnataka by Narayan [Sundararaman, 1993]). The multiple references to theatre and performances in his novels could also be understood as a response to Narayan’s “failure” as playwright.
* 7. Subsequent references are to this (2006/1958) edition of *The Guide* and will be cited paren-thetically by page number in the text.
* 8. Meenakshi Mukherjee pinpoints the novel’s usage of theatrical tropes when she writes: “Towards the end Raju loses the feeling of an actor, performing an act; the act becomes the reality, the mask becomes the man, and Raju, the guide turns into a guru” (1971: 128). Yet the question of Raju’s internal transformation remains open to the end.
* 9. For a discussion of *Bharatanatyam* in Narayan’s *The Guide* and Mahesh Dattani’s play *Dance* *Like a Man* (1994), see Chambers (2015).

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1. For a valuable discussion of the relationship between English and Tamil in Narayan’s work (and primarily *The Dark Room*) see Holmström (2007). See also Alexandru (2015) for an analysis of the role played by performance and performativity in Anglophone Indian novels’ reworking of classical Indian mythic poetics.
2. This is brilliantly reinforced by the description of the schoolmaster who becomes Raju’s “understudy”. Requested by Malone to enact Raju’s route to the river, and thus allowing the Hollywood director to calculate the various shooting angles, “the teacher” performs the entire routine while someone in the crowd jokes, “Oh! The master is also going to do penance and starve!” (195). The irony relies on the extent to which this “teacher”/“master” is actually fol-lowing in the footsteps of “the Guide”.
3. Although the diary is “dateless”, there are ample temporal signposts. Narayan arrives in the US in the summer (New York is scorching); holidays such as Halloween (1988/1960: 36) and Thanksgiving (73) are mentioned in passing; Narayan hopes to complete the novel’s first draft by 1 February (100); and so forth. As Narayan acknowledges in his afterword to the 1988 edition, “Datelessness has a limit. Sooner or later the seal of date shows up even in the most indifferently maintained diary” (1988/1960: 7).
4. Subsequent references are to this (1988/1960) edition of *My Dateless Diary* and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.
5. On Narayan’s involvement with Gemini Studios in the 1940s see Ram and Ram (1996: 319–324).
6. At this stage, Narayan has little to say about the novel’s plot, apart from one enigmatic refer-ence to Graham Greene’s view that Raju “should die” at the end of the story: “So I have on my hands the life of a man condemned to death before he is born and I have to plan my narrative to lead to it” (Narayan, 1988/1960: 100).
7. Consider three typical examples from Narayan’s Berkeley days: “Evening dinner at an Indian restaurant in San Francisco, our host being Ed Harper. Its elaborate and self-consciously planned Indian atmosphere, dim light, long coats, bogus Indian tunes out of gramophones [...]. Chappati and Indian curry, are genuine and are not bogus” (86); “Mrs Chamu was good enough to keep rice and curry and curd for me” (93); “That very night acquire an electric hot-plate, a saucepan, and rice, and vegetables, and venture to cook a dinner for myself. Profound relief that I don’t have to face again the Cafeteria carrot and tomato fare!” (96). Similar descriptions, complaints, and preoccupations appear throughout the entire diary.
8. Narayan’s stay in Hollywood, described in detail in Chapter 5 of *My Dateless Diary*, is of course teeming with references to American popular culture and to the affinities between the US and Indian film industries. Nevertheless, the straightforward engagement with the theme might explain why this section offers relatively little in terms of the aforementioned playful-ness regarding the multiple performances and role-playing.
9. On Rau’s significant role in shaping British and American notions of India, see Burton (2007).
10. Narayan’s fascination with Garbo could be traced back to his 1938 novel *The Dark Room*, in which the ambitious and flirtatious Shanta Bai is described as compressing her lips and jerking her head “in the perfect Garbo manner: the temperamental heroine and the impending doom” (1972/1938: 79). Desperate to “see a Garbo or Dietrich” film, she must settle for a “wretched Indian film”, “a stirring episode from the *Ramayana*” (1972/1938: 81). As Arnab Chakladar notes, the allusion to the iconic Garbo here is instrumental in shaping the novel’s intricate exploration of gendered politics and modernity (2012: 121–222).
11. Parallels between Narayan and Raju also surface in Ved Mehta’s portrait of Narayan, “The Train Had Just Arrived at Malgudi Station”, published in the *New Yorker* in September 1962 and reprinted in his *John is Easy to Please* (1971). Troubled about “the dramatization of ‘The Guide’”, Narayan explains (in his “soft, balmy” English, in which he prefixes a “y” to

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words beginning with “e”), that he feels “a little bit like Raju, whose wonderful career and affair with Rosie, in ‘The Guide’, came to an yend because of a small forgery, a little techni-cality. How nature imitates art!” (Mehta, 1971: 137, 161). Interestingly, the analogy here is not based on “enforced sainthood” but rather on a (trivial) misdemeanour — which is never specified. Mehta, incidentally, notes that “Garbo took [Narayan] to be a specimen of the mys-tic East” (152).

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