LETTERS

Dear Ms. Dryland:

We are considering using your submission "Empty House." But a close comparison of the English with the original Urdu raises some issues of fidelity for us. For although the original and the English version speak in terms of content of much the same thing, the feeling and pace of each are quite distinct. For example, the second stanza in the Urdu is characterized by a manner of ponderous melancholy, whereas the corresponding passage in the English fairly dances with joy. The result in English is quite pleasing, but its divergence from the original is also quite troubling to us. If you would please send us a one- or two-page note explaining what you hope to accomplish with your translations, it would help us make our decision.

—Muhammad Umar Memon

Dear Editor:

Thank you for your letter dated 14 February 1994. I have just returned from New Zealand, hence slight delay in replying. I am especially pleased for the contemporary Pakistani poet (in a general sense) that you are considering publication of the Qamar Jamil work.

The recent translations I have undertaken in Pakistan were done in close collaboration with the poets themselves. Every poem of [Sheikh] Ayaz and Fatima Hasan [Zaidi] was discussed in depth. Also with Azra Abbas and [Anwer] Sen Roy. "Khālī Makān" was almost the exception although I met the author on several occasions. I say "almost" because Qamar Jamil discussed the work with me very briefly the day prior to my departure.

I sent a copy of the translation to Mr. Jamil on my return. I quote from his response by mail: "… I am all the more happy because you have

successfully translated my poem 'Khālī Makān.' I am really proud of it. I liked your translation very much. I hope you will translate the article on poetry, 'A Short History of Urdu,' also very successfully. I will be thankful if you translate some of my poems … these will be a point of pride to me."

In our brief discussion of the work prior to my departure, Mr. Jamil said as follows: "I myself am the empty house. I think that no-one will come, but my beloved finally comes. It is about the love I felt in my youth for one girl. The black and white flowers suggest night and day. Both are blooming and people (erroneously) think that Spring is coming but in fact it is Autumn. The words suggest the agonies of Self—the emptiness. My soul is empty. The only essence that fills my soul is the Beloved."

I have to say that I regretfully (in a sense) feel that you may have similar difficulties accepting my translations of Faiz. I am pleased to say, however, that to my knowledge they were well-received—in certain circles—in Lahore. Sheikh Ayaz very accurately described them as "new poems on a theme of Faiz." I can live with his criticism very comfortably. What you personally feel it says of my translation skills may be entirely different.

I am translating essentially for Australian/New Zealand readers, as Ms. Naomi Lazard before me appeared to direct her work at American readership. If I tell you that my colleagues at University have said to me "What is Urdu?" you will immediately understand that if I attempt to present the public with literal-cum-technically perfect translations, with emphasis on adherence to authorial intention, the likelihood of stimulating interest in the work will be minimal. Knowledge of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, its provinces and languages is generally, in Australia, more than somewhat limited. Likewise its socio-politico and religious institutions.

In my book [on Faiz] I have stressed the uniqueness of the cross-cultural value of Faiz's work. A poem of Faiz's may be interpreted as political or indeed revolutionary by a Pakistani reader, whereas to the Australian reader, possibly totally ignorant of affairs in Pakistan, the same work may present as a beautiful love poem. How can it be otherwise?

I feel that my style of translation can stimulate interest in and appreciation of the work of Urdu poets without the reader in this part of the world of necessity having initially to be equipped with a working knowledge of the symbolism, metaphor and ambiguity, etc., which is so much a part of Urdu *shā'erī*. Further enlightenment can be introduced

over a period of time. My primary concern is to acquaint readers "down-under" with this rich cultural tradition, preferably in a form they can understand and to which they can relate. To this end I may appear to take liberties with the Source text.

There is no question that to the Urdu speaker the classical features are the very essence of Urdu *shā'erī,* but to the poetry reader in this part of the world—how can they possibly know that the caged *bulbul* may symbolize the political prisoner? It is not incumbent upon reader-interpreters to agree. I stress also the term "reader" because the oral tradition, i.e., the *mushā'era* is not popularly part of our cultural experience. My work therefore is designed for the enjoyment and stimulation of local poetry readers. Let them utilize their individual experiences of beauty, music, rhythm, sound, love, compassion, loss and agony in their interpretation, according to *their* understanding and experience of life. We in this part of the world have never experienced martial law, nor have we been subject to oppression, nor to marked restrictions on freedom of speech which of necessity may force the beleaguered poet to retire into symbolism, metaphor and ambiguity in order to escape the attention of reactionary government censorship.

In her *Translation Studies,* Susan Bassnett-McGuire says, "It is therefore quite foolish to argue that the task of the translator is to translate but not to interpret, as if the two were separate exercises" (p. 80). Perhaps further contemplation of the word *think* in lines 13 and 20 of "Khālī Makān" holds the clue to the perceived disparity. I stopped short of using "mistakenly" or "erroneously think" because I did not feel the necessity to be obvious. Also the term "porch" is one suggestive of warmth and homely comfort. I searched for an alternative—"deck"? "verandah"? "stoop"? The latter sounded somber enough but a highly unlikely term to use in our part of the world. I *did* consult with an Urdu-speaker regarding a suitable term.

It may therefore appall you to find that I have left a handful of lines off the end of one of Faiz's poems because I simply couldn't debase the work by concluding with "whatever will be, will be!" or, even worse, "*Que sera, sera!"* One would not want Faiz confused with Doris Day. I might also add that "hair" is a difficult term to deal with in translation. In Urdu *shā'erī* the term is one rich with romantic connotations. Here, due to electronic media saturation, it suggests "unwashed," "dandruff" or "baldness." Short hair on women is considered stylish, elfin, boyish and attractive. One also has to be wary of reference to sexual union for fear of offending audiences other than Western, which is why I used the oblique

term "coalescence" in *"Mujh sē Pehlī …"*

I hope this has clarified my approach. I am not being apologistic when I ask you to remember that there is no Dept. of Urdu in this country, hence in a pioneering sense I undertake the topic by "feel" and self-reliance, having no access to formal tuition. There is no funding available for Urdu Studies in Australia. I am not a technician, I merely work intuitively. For this reason, I feel the same constraints as those suffered by some Urdu poets at the hands of *qāfiya* and *radīf* when I attempt to translate the *ghazal* in rhyme. I readily admit that this may be lack of technical skill but, I say with respect that it does not interest me to take what I personally perceive to be a "wooden" and "soulless" approach.

—Estelle Dryland

Dear Editors:

In my review of *Nishtar,* which appeared in the *AUS #8*, I expressed some reservations about the existence of a Persian text on which the Urdu version is based.

Some of the information which has since come my way suggests, not convincingly I am afraid, that there may after all be a Persian text. I had not been aware of an article, "Urdū mēṅ Nāvil Nigārī kī Ibtidā," by Iqtidar Alam Khan in *Naqoosh* in which he claims that a Persian text in fact exists and the Urdu version, for the most part, follows it very closely. However, his failure to quote from the Persian original makes the whole affair very dubious.

Meanwhile two articles by Azeemush-Shan Siddiqi and Yusuf Sarmast in *Saughāt #5* (September 1993) take up the issue in detail and conclude that *Nishtar* is either an original work by Sajjad Husain Anjum Kasmandvi or a very free rendering of a Persian text which no one seems to have seen or examined so far.

So the novel or the adaptation remains shrouded in mystery. Even if the Persian text were to be found its discovery would have nothing to do with Urdu literature.

—Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman

Dear Editors:

I would like to respond to Professor Alamgir Hashmi's response to Ralph Russell's "How Not to Write the History of Urdu Literature" [*AUS* #8], a piece I have come back to from time to time over the past five years. Importantly, Professor Hashmi provides a much-needed clarification of the milieu in which "Sadiq, Saksena, & Co." wrote, reminding us of the impact of colonialism on the writing of Urdu historiography. I would like to quibble a bit with his comparison between what S, S, & Co. were doing and the comparison/emulation of Americans toward British literature; or the English toward France. In both these cases the comparison and emulation were taking place within a European literary tradition which was commonly derived, and shared literary aesthetics and genres. What is particularly distressing about the impact of English colonialism on Urdu literature is that evaluative criteria were imposed from quite outside the tradition, and paid little or no attention to the existing criteria. This often threatened to make nonsense of the actual literature being discussed. Professor Russell hits the nail on the head when he argues that there's little point in generating a critical corpus about a literature that ignores what is valued in that literature; and that one is swimming upstream when writing when one has no sympathy for said literature. On the other hand, Professor Russell does seem to "blame the victim" of cultural hegemony in this case; while Professor Hashmi stops short of calling it that, or of acknowledging the deleterious effects of such hegemony.

If these remarks serve to stimulate any debate within the pages of the *AUS*, I would welcome such dialogue with colleagues and fellow Urdu lovers.

—Carla Petievich