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Translator, Traitor or Teacher: A Neophyte-Focused Communication Pedagogy

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Comparative Literature

by

Ali Massoud Meghdadi

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Nasrin Rahimieh, Chair
Professor Steven Mailloux
Professor Jack Miles
Professor Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

2014

DEDICATION

To

My Family and Friends

Without you, I'd probably have still done this...
With whom though would I have celebrated?

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This project culminates nearly a decade of being nurtured and guided by a community of scholars, friends, and mentors. I have always wanted to create meaningful work. When it came to my scholarship, I wanted it to speak to the world unfolding around me so as to make it somehow better. What I have come to understand as better requires conversations, which need participants. My betterment occurred as a result of amazing conversations with fantastic people.

After a serendipitous introduction to Lane Bove one night at a restaurant, she invited me to consider a life of the mind at Loyola Marymount University, where I was then molded by the tender, yet commanding hands of Theresia De Vroom, Paul Harris, K.J. Peters, and Daniel Smith-Christopher. Studying with Guy Bennett, Dennis Phillips, and Paul Vangelisti at Otis College of Art and Design opened my eyes to a world of poetry and ideas I had never encountered before and it was also there that I began to deeply immerse myself in the theories of translation that evolved into this dissertation.

When I decided to pursue my doctorate, I applied broadly, and tried to visit most of the campuses I had applied to. However, upon meeting Nasrin Rahimieh there was no doubt in my mind that the University of California, Irvine (UCI) would be the best place for me. My dissertation committee all share a unique balance of deep scholarly investment and sincere passion for their students' development. More blessed than lucky, working with these people made even the most challenging parts of the process exciting. Thank you for everything Jack Miles, Steven Mailloux, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and of course Nasrin. My years at UCI allowed me the opportunity to learn from so many other people critical to the cultivation of this work: Jonathan Alexander, Eyal Amiran, Touraj Daryaei, Daniel Gross, Lynda Haas, Susan Jarratt, Adriana Johnson, Jane Newman, Chris O'Neal, Rei Terada, Gabi Schwab, and John Smith. And there could have been no way that I could have made it through my time there without the support and guidance of Bindya Baliga and Barbara Caldwell.

This work would not have been possible without the tremendous institutional support I received during my time in the Department of Comparative Literature in the School of Humanities at UCI. I am grateful for the Schaeffer and Pedagogical Fellowships, and myriad generous awards and travel grants from the Departments of English and Comparative Literature, as well as the Persian Studies Center and the Humanities Collective that allowed me to develop and complete this project.

Of course, this project is founded upon the inspired work of Shahrnush Parsipur and all of the brilliant people who interpreted her and helped to circulate *Women without Men* around the world and into my hands. Shoja Azari, Faridoun Farrokh, Steven Henry Madoff, Shirin Neshat, Jocelyn Sharlet, and Kamran Talattof, I cannot begin to express how grateful I am to you all, not just for your work, but how kindly and openly you shared your experiences and answered my barrage of questions.

And there is perhaps no stronger measure of my life than the quality of my friends. Der Baca, Scott Bloom, Mike Boucher, Alex Ebert, and Ivan Puchalt – the men who have forged more powerful memories in my life than anybody else. Brian Garcia and Tae Sung who trudged a parallel path with me at UCI, teaching me so much through all of it. So many miles pedaled with Sean Drake, yet never enough rocks climbed with Nathan Fulton – both of you helped develop my ideas and strengthen my body. Some of my greatest teachers have never been inside of a classroom with me, but have taught me such crucial lessons in my life. And two of them, Dan Pallotta and Fariborz Azhakh, I am fortunate enough to now even call my friends. Thank

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I once said that if I received my PhD for no other reason than to make my family happy that would have been more than enough reason for me. They are ever an unwavering source of support and the purest affection I've ever known. Thank you to my grandparents Mostafa and Soltan for teaching me what unconditional love feels like and my uncles Kambiz and Kaveh for lovingly showing me how to be a man. Grateful that my family is made up of people I'm thrilled to have as friends even if we weren't related: Alice, Babak, Borzou, Dokhi, Isabella, Laleh, Laurie, Mahnaz, Nadia, Naghmeh, Neda, Neghin, Negar, Shant, Sophia, and Yeganeh – I love you all so much.

And there is nobody else who has been more important on this journey or taught me more in life than Lida Khanverdi. My lion, friend, mother, and the best version of sheer goodness I have ever experienced in my life.

Even if this work does not make the world better, because of all of these people, I am the best I've ever been. Thank you.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Master of Arts in English, Loyola Marymount University; 2007, *Summa Cum Laude*
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Teaching

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- English 39c – Argument and Research (summer 2011-2014 online, winter/spring 2012 hybrid, winter 2013-present)
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Graduate Student Writing Tutor and Writing Seminar coordinator, Graduate Resource Center, University of California at Irvine, fall 2009 through summer 2010

Loyola Marymount University, 2006-2008

- English 110 – College Writing
- English 140 – Introduction to Fiction

Publications (cont.)

“Synecdoche – Laleh Khorramian,” *Canvass* magazine (Mixed Media Publishing, April 2012)

“Irangeles: A Fantasy Community of Iranian Exiles,” in *Creoles, Diasporas, Cosmopolitanisms: Creolization of Nations, Cultural Migrations, Global Languages and Literatures* (Academica Press, 2012)

Publications (cont.)

“Manifesting Beowulf’s Meta-Monsters,” in *Interpreting Great Classics of Literature as Metatheatre and Metafiction: Ovid, Beowulf, Corneille, Racine, Wieland, Stoppard, and Rushdie* (The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd., 2011)

Guide to the Richard Rorty Papers, co-authored with Dawn Schmitz, Brian Jao Garcia, and Tae-Kyung Timothy Elijah Sung (California Digital Library 2010)

“I ran,” *The Truth about the Fact* (Loyola Marymount University 2008)

“3 Meditations on One Misery,” *The Strip* (Otis 2008)

“I Spy a Butler: A Review of Oliver Cadiot’s *Colonel Zoo*,” *New Review of Literature* (Otis 2007)

Research & Editing

In-house copy editor at Advertising for Humanity. A marketing strategy and advertising agency that targets humanitarian organizations, May 2011 to present.

Researcher for Dan Pallotta’s Technology Entertainment Design (TED) conference talk *The way we think about charity is dead wrong*, March 2013.

Researcher on Dan Pallotta’s *Charity Case: How the Humanitarian Sector can Transform Itself by Standing Up for Itself* (Jossey-Bass 2012), August – November 2011

Richard Rorty Papers; University of California, Irvine, Libraries; October-December, 2009 (Worked with special collections librarian and colleagues to arrange and describe the manuscripts and personal papers of Richard Rorty, in preparation for research use in the Critical Theory Archive.)

Researcher on Dan Pallotta’s *Uncharitable* (Rutgers UP 2008), January – April 2008

Invited Conference Papers and Presentations

“Cosmopolitan Composition: Commingling Foreign and Local Minds to Cultivate Compassion,” UC Writing Conference (University of California, San Diego: October 2014)

“Complex Conversations,” Translation Symposium On Shahrnush Parsipur’s *Women without Men* & The Task of the Translator of Persian Literature (University of California, Irvine: February 2014)

Co-Organizer (with Brian Garcia and Tae Sung) of *literature { } religion: Conference for the Study of Literature and Religion* (University of California, Irvine: May 2012)

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“Breaking the Law: Intellectuals and their Slippage between Systems,” The International Society for the History of Rhetoric’s XVIII Biennial Conference (University of Bologna, Bologna IT: July 2011)

“*The Blind Owl* In and Out of Context: American Influences,” *The Blind Owl: A Workshop*. (University of California, Irvine: April 2011)

“Content Confronts Context,” with Brian Garcia and Tae Sung, “Time Will Tell, But Epistemology Won’t: In Memory of Richard Rorty” (University of California, Irvine: May 2010)

“Irangeles: A Fantasy Community of Iranian Exiles,” American Comparative Literature Association’s 2010 Annual Meeting (New Orleans, Louisiana: April 2010)

Organizer of *Teach-In On Iran: Uprising Of The Human Spirit*, a public forum on the June 12, 2009 Iranian elections (Loyola Marymount University: July 2009)

“Transposing Translation,” Politics and Ethics of Translation (University of California, Irvine: May 2009)

Respondent to Salar Abdoh, Iranian-American Writers in Dialogue (University of California, Los Angeles: April 2009)

“Persistent Threshold: Iran’s Traumatized Stasis,” Exploring Iran: Emerging Scholarship in Iranian Studies (University of California, Irvine: February 2009)

“Manifesting Beowulf’s Meta-Monsters,” American Comparative Literature Association’s 2009 Annual Meeting (Harvard University: March 2009)

“Singularity,” Synthetics: The 18th Annual Southland Graduate Student Conference, UCLA English Department (University of California, Los Angeles: May 2007)

“Witnessing the Witness,” University of California Riverside’s 2007 Graduate Humanities Conference, (dis)junctions: Malappropriation Nation (University of California, Riverside: April 2007)

“Transposing Trauma: A Group Ethnography of Survivor Testimony,” West Jewish Studies Association Annual Conference (Portland, Oregon: March 2007)

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Otis College of Art & Design Graduate Writing Grant (2008)

Loyola Marymount University Teaching Fellowship (2007)

Loyola Marymount University Writing Award for Graduate Division Playwriting (2007)

Otis College of Art & Design Graduate Writing Grant (2006)

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Translations & Language Proficiency

Technology Entertainment Design (TED) Open Translation Project volunteer translator for multiple English to Persian translations. (Writing Persian Subtitles for talks delivered in English)

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Translator, Traitor or Teacher: A Neophyte-Focused Communication Pedagogy

By

Ali Massoud Meghdadi

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Irvine, 2014

Professor Nasrin Rahimieh, Chair

This dissertation presents a theory of teaching derived from the production and reception of translations, with a particular focus on the neophyte. The neophyte is described as either an individual who through the process of literary translation deepens his or her understanding of a new language, or a new reader of translations beginning to harvest a cosmopolitan worldview.

Since its initial 1988 Iranian publication, Shahrnush Parsipur's *Women without Men* was first translated into English in 1998, then made into a film in 2009, and translated into English again in 2011 – an exceedingly peculiar circulation that stems from an equally complicated clash of international politics and cultural production. Using this text and its various iterations as case studies, I situate the works in both a theoretical network and literary tradition to then unpack operative hermeneutic principles. From the translations, I outline the unique pedagogical attributes obtained from the production and reception of translated works, with a marked advocacy of the neophyte on either end of this practice.

First, the process of translation is traced from a critical reading of the source text and analysis of the renderings. The subjectivity and hermeneutics of the translators is then explored using material gathered from a symposium on *Women without Men* held at UC Irvine on

February 14, 2014 with Parsipur, all three of her English translators, and other prominent scholars in the field. Discussions of the politics of translation, Iran, and America, with Parsipur's work as the central point of reference, resulted in fascinating insights from the author and translators that day.

A problem that was brought to the fore during the *Women without Men* Symposium was the dearth of translated material from Eastern cultures in the West, despite the great fortitude going the other way. This necessitates cultivation of not just people who speak multiple languages, but also those who are using their competency, and perhaps even advancing it, in the translation of Eastern literatures for a Western audience. In my conclusion, in reference to this problematic I submit the experiences of the translators of *Women without Men* as testimony from exemplary neophytes serving as both creator and audience. My dissertation seeks to promote more translation projects, both as a method to learn languages, as well as an introduction to foreign concepts.

INTRODUCTION – **TRANSLATOR, TRAITOR OR TEACHER**

Our being in the world is essentially an act of translation that occurs in all moments. We are constantly interpreting our amorphic sense of self, ideas, and ontology into concretized messages that can be understood by our fellows. The more complex and nuanced the concept, the more we rely on creative tropes in our use of language, employing metaphors and allegories to fill in the blanks for that which defies linear comprehension. Although we may at times yearn for the sort of transparency found in an invoice, in contending with existential explications, we have to settle for approximation. Full human being requires legislation with linguistic tools that are far more malleable.

Wittgenstein wrote, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (74). Communication is ever trapped in that zone of entanglement along the boundary between two or more human beings attempting to correspond. And even there it is fraught with misunderstanding caused by filtration through the beliefs and experiences of each individual engaging in that communication act. We are constantly translating to some degree or another the articulations of communication we experience.

Confined by the limits of our final, although not necessarily conclusive, vocabulary, comprehending our very essence requires translation. What Rorty refers to as our “final vocabulary” is really just final for only the moment we are experiencing it.¹ Our language, like ourselves, continually grows and unfolds, especially when inspired. Translation is an ideal vessel for this transformation – internally for the translator, as well as externally in service to those who might now learn from the foreign through the translation.

¹ Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

The term “pedagogue” in ancient Greece primarily referred not to the teacher, but to the slave that accompanied the child to school. The word itself means, “to lead the child,” and in many ways it helps to think of translators in this light (Smith). Translation is a teacher that delivers an idea originally intended for some other people and place to a fresh, new audience interested in learning about and from these foreign minds. In every instant of a translation, a transcendental communion of cultures is being attempted, for the translator, like the pedagogue, can only deliver the child to the academy; the onus for whatever happens on the other side is on the child. Although various traditions are always embedded in any cultural production, what constitutes a translation is the instantaneous and constant communing of author and translator for the didactic benefit of an imagined audience.

The task of translation requires the translator splinter between various contexts and cultures to comprehend the original source, speak to a specific target, and serve as an undisplacable mediator in the rift between them. She dichotomizes herself along the most intimate lines, navigating and layering disparate landscapes as she moves existing expressions into abstract conceptions then into newly forged terms for a different people. When a person says “happy,” he or she is referring to an abstraction that is not tangibly represented in the real world. Not in the same way as “sea foam green” or “2008 Toyota Prius.” Still, even with “2008 Toyota Prius,” two people might be thinking of entirely different cars despite sharing a language, culture, beliefs, and practices. We approximate the concepts in our minds through the language used to express them – translating between languages and cultures only exacerbates this predicament in every possible way. The goal however is far from achieving oneness, nor really needing to broach it; even in those rare occasions when the context seems to demand such exactitude, some slippage is inevitable. Close enough is more than just good enough; it really is

what we always must accept, if for no other reason than semiotic equivalence between languages does not exist, as Eco makes plain, noting, “We cannot even accept the naïve idea the equivalence in meaning is provided by synonymy, since it is commonly accepted that there are no complete synonyms in language” (*Experiences* 9). In translation we seek proximal equivalencies to embody the essence of the source into the target.

Translating Self to Text

Broadly there are two distinct forms of translation. *Phenomenological translating of self*, to rephrase Gadamer, using language to understand our being.² Likewise, there is *Textual translation*, the common idea of carrying something, usually a literary work, across from a source to target language. The former always informs the latter, for our identities are only revealed in actions. Textual translation is invariably conditioned by one’s subjectivity, since the intention of the translator drives the hermeneutics that guide the contours of interpretation, production, and reception.

Hermeneutics offers a set of principles we apply for understanding one’s being in the world through analysis of his or her rhetoric, Mailloux explains:

Hermeneutics deals with interpretation focused on texts, and rhetoric with figuration and persuasion directed at audiences. “Interpretation” can be defined as the establishment of textual meaning; while “rhetoric” as figurative and suasive force might be characterized as the effects of texts or, more pointedly, as the political effectivity of trope and argument in culture. Interpretation involves the translation of one text into another, a Hermes-like mediation that is also the transformation of one linguistic event into a later one. Rhetoric involves the transformation of one audience into another, which is also a psychogogic translation from one position into a different one. These translation and transforming activities relate to each other historically and theoretically in a complex mixture.

² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, “Being that can be understood is language” (470).

This “complex mixture” is the subject of inquiry in this dissertation, as hermeneutics and translation overlap precisely at the point of interpretation.

Cultivating understanding through interpretation is the goal of hermeneutics. Translators take their understanding and rhetorically transpose it from one culture to another. Gadamer writes:

Here the translator must translate the meaning to be understood into the context in which the other speaker lives. This does not, of course, mean that he is at liberty to falsify the meaning of what the other person says. Rather, the new meaning must be preserved, but since it must be understood within a new language world, it must establish its validity within it in a new way. Thus every translation is at the same time an interpretation. We can even say that the translation is the culmination of the interpretation that the translator has made of the words given him. (386)

At any given moment the translator is confined by her final vocabulary and must construct the translation with only those materials. This contingency is one of the reasons texts are retranslated.

As societies develop and language changes, cultural artifacts must stay current or gradually move from use to archives and museums then down to underground vaults and eventually oblivion. However, the unique aspect of the interpretation involved with the production of literary translations usually necessitates the translator learn new words and phrases to adroitly express source to target. An intrinsic didactic component is a common requirement in the particular interpretive process of translations, and although all texts require interpretation, that there are several languages implicated in the interpretation makes the task of interpretation exceedingly rife with potentially amazing and catastrophic results.

Gadamer presents the translator with her inherent duty and opportunity: to confront otherness, the unknown. The ideal is not to make the other like oneself, but simply to make

known and perhaps even relish in the otherness of others, and maybe to make oneself more like the other. He writes:

In bridging the gulf between languages, the translator clearly exemplifies the reciprocal relationship that exists between interpreter and text, and that corresponds to the reciprocity involved in reaching an understanding in conversation. For every translator is an interpreter. The fact that a foreign language is being translated means that this is simply an extreme case of hermeneutical difficulty—i.e., of alienness and its conquest. In fact, all the “objects” with which traditional hermeneutics is concerned are alien in the same unequivocally defined sense. The translator’s task of re-creation differs only in degree, not in kind, from the general hermeneutical task that any text presents.
(389)

We are all well experienced in this task of interpretation and translation to varying degrees from our “conversations” with one another to cultural artifacts we create or re-create. It is something we can and do practice, which like any skill, with meticulous effort and time, we can become better at it. The more we do it, the more flexible our language becomes, allowing our ideas to bend more readily toward the end we need, hope for, or seek.

Traitor or Teacher

Given the subtleties of perception and expression, regardless of a lifetime of experience, translation is always a confounding process that invariably results in misunderstanding, confusion, mistakes, and even intentional deception. The new audience of a translation discovers a point of view from a point of view, both of which are understood to be biased, laden with intention, and severed from foundational context. Knowing this, the audience, like someone regarding any message in translation or right from the mouth of babes, is required to evaluate the messenger and decide for themselves what the purpose actually is. However, in every case, when confronted with this decision, the audience must determine whether the text puts forward the

prospect of learning from the insight of another through the trustworthy toils of a translator or if it is best fit for rejection as traitorous mistranslation by a swindler.

Straddling two cultures, translators operate from a liminal space that has long spawned suspicion and contempt, thus the perennial denunciation, “*Traduttore/traditore!*” [Translator/traitor]. There are various interpretations of this Italian phrase, but all ultimately suggest that given the translator’s position as the necessary junction between alien communities, considerable faith must be put into this figure. The questions of loyalty to the source in translations of literary work also speak to a wariness of those who are too familiar with the other. Doubts about fidelity to the original on the part of the translator in service of a target audience address not merely the mechanical labor of translation, but the ideological orientation of this liminal figure acting as portal of (mis)understanding. Translators and critics for centuries have debated about the “fidelity of the translation”, “loyalty to the source”, and other such inquiries about the trustworthiness of the text, all of which branch out from a metatextual scrutiny of the translator’s subjective allegiances.^{3 4} Does this individual cater more to the source or target culture? What does that tell us about their politics? In constructing their translation, how did they deal with incomparables given this? What did they leave out of their “Translator’s Preface” about what they left out of the translation? Is this translation the work of somebody trying to teach me something about a foreign culture or are they circulating some rendition that betrays the force and essence of the source for selfish motives?

Unfortunately though, if the text is mistranslated, translated as something far removed from its initial intended meaning, the intentionality of the translator is only exhibited to

³ The question of translator loyalty in regards to *Women without Men* is directly addressed in Chapter 2, section titled “Translator’s Fidelity to Audience vs. Fidelity to Author,” 82-85.

⁴ For an excellent historical treatment of translator “fidelity”, see the chapter “The Issue of Trust: The Long Shadow of Oral Translation” (117-130) in David Bellos’s *Is that a Fish in Your Ear?*

somebody who can access and understand the original. Thus, the challenge of ascertaining proximity to the source material, short of actually learning the language and absorbing its culture, requires a comparative analysis of the renderings. Multiple translations of source texts might be the best or only way to defend against divergent interpretations and intentions in the subsequent distribution of these ideas. By examining a multiplicity of perspectives in the target language, the limits of the translator's hermeneutics begin to manifest. Where any single translator could be a traitor, conspiracies amongst polyglots are rare indeed.

Cosmopolitanism of the New

Currently there is a surplus of information flowing from the West (America and Europe) into the East (Asia) and quite little returning. To confront this dilemma, we must consider how to inspire new scholars of the world to demand works from afar and be prepared to produce them when they are lacking. In the best of all scenarios, the new audience of a translation is overcome with the desire to take the task upon themselves. Aroused by the translation, either excited by the scholarship of their fellows or seeing room for improvement, they choose to translate the work again, or perhaps apply their hand at an entirely different text. Expanding the afterlife of either one – the student becomes the teacher. Given this opportunity for rumination, examination, and engagement, translations fill in the voids of the world. When they inadvertently create a fresh rift while attempting to seal a previous fissure, the only people who will find the translation lacking are those who know the original well enough to make such a claim, and have the time and courage to do better themselves.

The prettiest translation is not necessarily the best one. Sometimes the best translation is the one that begs for retranslation, indicating something of such value that it ought not be denied

people because of something so readily surmountable as an interpretive barrier. The Bible, for example, no matter how competent or exacting the translation, continues to merit new translations. Contexts shift, people change, languages evolve, societies collapse. The Bible has been treated to more translations than any other book in human history; “[b]y the opening of the year 2000, the entire Bible had been made available in 371 languages and dialects, and portions of the Bible in 1,862 other languages and dialects” (Metzger 9). Conservative estimates of Bible translations into English alone are over 500 (Just). A book to be translated once is a big deal; a second time, then it is likely a cultural gem; more than twice and almost certainly it speaks in some acute way to the human condition. The so-called great books of the canon generally receive a new translation about every fifty to seventy-five years – most of the time by scholars who were trained on previous translations of the very same books that they are now retranslating.⁵

Before he took it on for himself, Vladimir Nabokov had read every translation of *Eugene Onegin*, in French as well as in English, but only “some of the rhymed German ones” (122). Unsatisfied with what he discovered, he thought he could do better. He believed he could do better. In explaining his motivation, he writes of other translations, “All are the result of earnest effort and of an incredible amount of mental labor; all contain here and there little gems of ingenuity; and all are grotesque travesties of their model, rendered in dreadful verse, teeming with mistranslations” (122). Nabokov’s work speaks to the lacunae he found in previous renderings. Where most had focused on the rhymed style of the original, Nabokov wanted to ensure the foreign reader would grasp the litany of deep cultural signifiers riddled in Aleksandr Pushkin’s opus. Although they were never in the same room together, the previous translators of

⁵ Paraphrased from Prof. Franklin Lewis at the *Women without Men* Symposium, UC Irvine, 14 February, 2014. Commenting on the exceptionality of this book’s translations, he said: “I’d like to stress that we’re in a very unique situation. 50-75 years is common cycle for the retranslation of classic works. But that’s always at an interval with some perspective. This is a very, very unique situation.”

Onegin – Dupont, Spalding, Deutsch, Elton, Radin, and Patrick – were quite fixed at the front of his mind when Nabokov embarked on his project.

Translational Ethics

For the translator a unique connection is procured through the process of translating a text. It is from this sensitivity, or attempt to achieve it, that any translator, even a so-called “bad” one, operates. Struggling through the ideas and expressions of an alien culture in the act of translating instills a kernel of understanding far different in kind from reading a work translated into one’s native tongue. A translator lives inside of two languages while engaged in the process of translation. Before the crafting of a translation, it is always through the reading of translations where new people are inspired to produce translations themselves. Some of the most creative uses of language, both in production and reception, are a result of fumbling with attempts for equality where it simply does not exist between cultures and their languages. It is in these moments that translators express their skill set by bringing the foreign and familiar together in an effort to create understanding where there was only silence before, and readers of translations learn how to compensate for or plug the gaps in their cosmopolitanism. Appiah explains the tenets of this worldview, such that it ought to pervade the ethos of the translator as well as the ethics espoused when interacting with the ideas of others:

So there are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life. Whatever our obligations are to others (or theirs to us) they often have the right to

of their own way. As we'll see, there will be times when these two ideals—universal concern and respect for legitimate difference—clash. There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge. (xv)

Translation is the foundation of contamination with other cultures; it is the threshold through which the practices and beliefs of other people enter our lives. The hermeneutics of translation should be contoured by this cosmopolitan ethic toward authentic representation, especially if the split between source and target cultures turns chasm. As foreignness increases, both anxiety and intrigue toward the other compound, and commensurate with this is a skepticism toward that curious cosmopolitan individual who can spread her being so broadly across the globe.

World Literature encompasses the transmission of stories beyond the culture that initially wrote them. The tool required to bring about this global communication is translation. The abyss between some languages and cultures in many ways seems untraversable, especially when this challenge is multiplied by time and animosity. It becomes easier to ignore the other if their ideas seem insensible, and there is no way to make sense of anything if it is ignored. Silence, too often, simply begets more silence.

It has been argued that there can be no true understanding across cultures, but largely that comes down to the willingness for somebody to reach out and attempt to bring the unknown and foreign into a realm where they can be known once rendered as more familiar. This is what Ricoeur considers to be the space of hospitality between languages and cultures⁶ or what Benjamin idealistically aims to achieve in the translator's chase for a "pure language."⁷ Both Benjamin and Ricoeur propose cosmopolitan ideals for the translator to target in communication campaigns unfettered by any individual nation or culture; whether this is achievable is not as important as the continuing pursuit.

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *On translation*.

⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator."

***Women without Men* models the Neophyte**

Shahrnush Parsipur's *Women without Men*, originally written in Persian, has been translated into English twice in its fairly young life – first in 1998 by Kamran Talattof and Jocelyn Sharlet and again in 2011 by Faridoun Farrokh, all scholars of Iranian and American literature with varying degrees of translating experience at the time. It was also adapted into a successful independent film by famed Iranian visual artist Shirin Neshat and her collaborator Shoja Azari in 2009. Through an analysis of both translations into English, as well as its film adaptation, my dissertation delineates choices made by translators aimed at speaking across cultural lines toward acutely didactic ends, essentially positing how translation as production and product functions as teacher.

The pattern of inquiry informing this dissertation moves from an objective distance to deeper within the subjectivity of the translator. Each chapter sinks a bit further inside of the experience of translating – first choosing and intimately reading a source text, then analyzing its interpretations, then allowing the interpreters to explain their choices, and finally adapting what is learned to a neophyte translator or reader of translations. Chapter 1 presents a close reading of Parsipur's *Women without Men*, with attention paid to the poignant tone, symbols, and language she employs. To clarify Parsipur's place in both the literary and cultural tradition of Iran, a historical and political context is presented to locate the ideological underpinnings for some of the translators' choices directly examined in Chapter 2. It is critical to situate the choices these scholars made in rendering this text for new audiences in context of the translation theories that inform the reception of their works. Analyzing and comparing their work extrinsically sets the stage for the intrinsic reflections examined in the next chapter.

Each of these interpretative campaigns/translations made discrete choices that allude to the broader socio-political and cultural aims of the translators. Although these insights are rarely available to critics, on February 14th, 2014, Professor Nasrin Rahimieh organized a symposium on *Women without Men* at UC Irvine that gathered most of the principal figures involved in the production of the literary translations, from original author to the translators, as well as their past and current collaborators, disciplinary colleagues, and even myself, who had the privilege of sharing a panel with Rahimieh and Parsipur. Throughout the day we analyzed and addressed disparities between the texts and the reasons behind these, as well as how the translations inherently shared pedagogical intentions; although not identical in design, using translation as a teaching tool oriented both of the translation efforts. Building with material drawn from the *Women without Men* Symposium, as well as interviews with the director of the film adaptation and her collaborator on the film's subtitles and voiceovers, in Chapter 3, I offer a discreet study of the extreme emotional investment and rigor that the work of translation demands and what melioristic intentions move these productions.

Despite both the gaps between and within cultures, our species is marked by a compulsion to understand itself through a hermeneutic reading of our context and function within it. This process of phenomenological hermeneutics shares salient features with what literary translators do in rendering a text from one place for some other. In Chapter 4, following the establishment of my position in the field of translation theory and its phenomenological correlations, I will present my argument for the endorsement of a pedagogy of translation driven by either the desire for the linguistic neophyte to deepen his or her understanding of a language through the process of literary translation or to construct a translation with an intended audience that has virtually no relationship or understanding of the source culture. Therein, I define the

attributes of this “neophyte” based on paragons found in the two translations of *Women without Men* and its film adaptation.

Translation can serve as a utensil for cultivation of a cosmopolitan understanding of the world by inviting the neophyte into a praxis that has too long been monopolized by monolithic and categorical *authorities* – the Nabokov’s of the literary world. Such folks are so myopically focused on their own prescription for *ideal* interpretation that they are rendered unwilling to, or perhaps incapable of, considering alternative audiences, purposes, or values lurking in the works of others. In fact, they tend to be exceptionally suspicious of those with a grasp of source or target languages/cultures that resides closer to competency than mastery. If, however, we can present translation as a method to encourage language learning, turning neophytes into experts in the process, then from these fresh minds we may discover novel responses to long vexing challenges, in particular the dearth of translated material from the East in the West, and more broadly the scant selection of works translated at all. Neophyte translation pedagogy is entirely focused on process, both in the production of translations and in their reception.

This project determines how translation operates as a space for intimate interaction, exchange, and learning between strangers and even enemies. The form of reading involved in generating a translation, as well as in reading one serves extraordinary pedagogical values that no other literary cultural production can achieve so readily. In the act of reading a source text for a translation, the translator learns to embody the material so as to collude with it in the creation of something new. In reading a translation, the audience must trust a stranger’s interpretation of ideas from a foreign land with sometimes-incomparable cultures. To varying degrees, a cosmopolitan compassion is invoked in the process that may lead not merely to engagement, but melioristic transaction with a distinct intention for continued engagement. As Gadamer suggests,

translation ought to be presented as a quotidian process occurring in every one of our interactions with others; therefore, we can be and should be more daring in our attempts to communicate, to translate ourselves in foreign and likely uncomfortable domains.⁸ To applaud the contamination and integration that occurs when muddling through an alien language and culture in a dire effort to express the simplest statement manifests a willingness to invite and cherish the stranger in a new world created together.

⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, “Language as the Medium of Hermeneutic Experience.”

TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

A great deal of deliberation went into deciding whether to employ the Talattof/Sharlet or Farrokh translation of *Women without Men* throughout this work. Although I considered providing my own translations, given that I analyze their translations herein, it seemed more prudent to use these previously published works. For the sake of consistency and because of easier availability, unless otherwise indicated, I have used the Farrokh translation.

Unless otherwise noted, all other translations from the Persian are mine.

With the exception of previously published works, for all transliterations from Persian into English, I have employed the *Iranian Studies* transliteration scheme.⁹ In the case of the proper names of the characters, I have used Farrokh's transliteration, except when directly quoting from or referring to the Talattof/Sharlet translation.

⁹ <http://iranianstudies.com/journal/transliteration>.

CHAPTER 1 – *ZANAN BEDUN-E MARDAN*, INTIMATELY READ

Born in 1946 in Iran, Shahrnush Parsipur is as much a successful author as she is a charged politico whose actions and messages have sent ripples through Iran's government leading to multiple imprisonments and ultimately exile. Embracing her craft from the age of sixteen, she completed her first novel, *Sag va Zemestan-e Boland* [The Dog and the Long Winter], when she was twenty-eight, and then in the same year was jailed for protesting against the torture of a pair of journalists/activists by SAVAK, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's secret police. She then left Iran to study in France for a few years, but complications resulting from the Islamic Revolution forced Parsipur to return to Iran where she was later jailed for four years and seven months over a misunderstanding with the Islamic Republic. It was during this time that she wrote her most celebrated work, *Touba va ma'na-ye Shab* [Touba and the Meaning of Night], published upon her release in 1987. In 1989, over a decade after she had finished writing it, Parsipur published her novella *Zanan Bedun-e Mardan* [Women without Men], inverting the title of a 1927 short story collection by Ernest Hemingway, *Men without Women*. Viewed as provocative and sexually explicit by the Islamic Republic, Parsipur was jailed on two separate occasions over this book, in 1991 and again 1992. She left Iran for a year in 1992, and upon returning learned that the publication of all her works was banned there. Robbed of her voice, she left the country and has since lived as an exile in the United States.

Merger of the Classics and Modernism in Parsipur

Women without Men tells about the lives of five women in Tehran each undergoing a radical transformation as their lives intersect. All of their narratives begin with the women trapped in seemingly immutable tragic circumstances, but teetering on the brink of cataclysmic

rebirth. Mahdokht is both a victim of and an advocate for the austere moral code saturating the minds of so many Iranian women; she is desperate to experience the world, but so rooted in her culture and society that she has to transform herself into a tree, which atomizes into seeds and is spread across the planet by the wind to do so. Munis is stuck under the thumb of her ultra-oppressive older brother but longs to explore the world; however to do so, she has to die twice before living once. Fa'iza, Munis's best friend, is in love with Munis's brother, but he marries somebody else initially and breaks Fa'iza's heart. She eventually wins his affection, but has to share him as his second wife. Farrokhlaqa was stuck in a resentment-fueled marriage that ends suddenly when she accidentally kills her husband, thus freeing her to explore her artistic predilections squashed by his overwhelming rule. And Zarrinkolah, the prostitute who stops seeing heads on men, escapes from the brothel she has lived at since childhood, runs off to Karaj, and marries the only good man in the narrative, the Kind Gardener. She bears them a child, which happens to be a lily, whereupon all three of them disappear into a cloud of smoke. Clearly, Parsipur embeds her narrative deep in nuanced allegories that vacillate between the socio-political turmoil of 1950's Tehran and magical realist tropes that unfold in fantastical gardens.

The novella is broken up into fifteen short chapters, each recounting the thoughts and experiences of the character for whom the chapter is named. Although some of the characters slip into the narratives of other characters, all of the chapters are named for the single character who is its principal focus.

The only chapter that is not named for a character is the eighth chapter, "Two Women on the Road" – situated exactly in the middle of the book, it ties the first half of the book to the latter. The opening seven chapters of the book deliver the exposition and key conflicts in the lives of the characters, all set in Tehran. The last seven chapters explore how these characters are

magically brought together to confront their issues in a country home surrounded by a lush and enchanting garden in a city north of Tehran called Karaj.

Only a few subtle hints direct the astute reader to realize that the 1953 CIA organized coup of Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mossadegh is the broader context for this surrealistic tale. Much of Parsipur's narrative jumps around in time, with seeming aporia in one character's narrative being rationalized by peripheral aspects of another's. The perspective is usually from a single character at a time, but given the surrealistic style of the text, it can be difficult to determine where one character's subjective reflection blends into another's musing.

Although it is tempting to attribute magical aspects of her storytelling to the influence of the genre's modern master, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Parsipur's intended literary heritage is far more local to the story's Iranian context, personal experiences, and the author's own cultural underpinnings.¹⁰ "I had never even read Marquez until years after I wrote *Women without Men*," Parsipur told me in a summer 2013 interview when I asked her about the influence of the famed Colombian magical realist writer on her work. "All of the surrealism you find in the book is my own and really the only literary source I drew upon was *1001 Nights*." When reading her work in tandem with this collection of stories from the ancient world, myriad tropes surface that readily align Parsipur with literary constructs that beautifully blend the framing device and feminist narrative found in this classic as well as with characteristic themes and styles of 20th century Iranian literature.

¹⁰ Even in the introduction by Shirin Neshat, the director of the film adaptation of *Women without Men*, published in the most recent English translation of the book (Farrokh's), the allusion is to Marquez and not *Arabian Nights/1001 Nights*. Neshat opens her foreword as follows: "Gabriel Garcia Marquez once defined magic realism as the way in which his grandmother told stories to him" (vii). Nowhere does she ever mention the elements of *Arabian Nights/1001 Nights* that Parsipur drew upon in writing her book, even though the two of them spent "six years" working on developing the film together. This is not so much a failing on Neshat's part as it keenly expresses the intended audience of this translation; indicating they are likely far more familiar with Marquez's work than his ancient antecedent loosely sharing a genre. I will explore this more closely in Chapter 3.

Opening *Zanan Bedun-e Mardan* by Reading it Close

Chapter 1 – Mahdokht

Two critical elements are introduced in the opening pages of the book. Obviously, Mahdokht is the most complex and enigmatic character in the entire narrative, but more broadly significant is the image of a verdant garden as the refrain Parsipur constantly returns to throughout the entire book. She writes, “The orchard, vibrantly green and with adobe walls, backed up against the village at one end and bordered the river at the other” (1). Mahdokht is an uptight schoolteacher who often fantasizes about a life far from the doldrums of her Tehrani existence. However, she is heavily oppressed by her own fears of the outside world and the impressions of others. When the principal at her school asks her to go to movie with him, she does not merely reject his delicate advance, but quits working at the school altogether lest she be perceived by her colleagues as a loose woman. Nevertheless, when she learns a year later that this same principal has married somebody else, she feels “such a tightness in her chest as if her heart was about to burst out” (3). Her brother on the other hand is avid for children and produces five, which inspires Mahdokht to reflect on a movie she had recently seen, *The Sound of Music*. Curiously, this reflection is quite impossible given the time frame of the narrative, which must take place in the early 1950’s, and *The Sound of Music*, released in 1965. Even more strangely, the scene she ponders does not actually happen in the film:

She had recently seen a movie with Julie Andrews in it. Julie’s character had become involved with an Austrian man, the martinet father of seven children whom he ordered around by blowing a whistle. Julie had first intended to join a convent but had thought better of it and married the Austrian since she was expecting his eighth child, especially since the Nazis were marching on Austria and there were many uncertainties. (4)

Julie Andrews' character, Maria, never becomes pregnant in the film nor does she marry the baron.¹¹ This bizarre license in recreating the story would only be noted by readers familiar enough with the film to mark upon this drastic deviation, whereas it would simply wash over somebody unfamiliar with *The Sound of Music* as merely a convenient allegory.¹² Such distortions recur throughout the narrative.

This bending of time that allows the text a nimble, interpretative quality makes it ideal for translation across languages and cultures. As much as it is an Iranian narrative, the structure and style allow it to flow well beyond these originary distinctions. Rahimieh explains:

Certain segments of the novella are situated in 1953, while others are not clearly dated. This produces a sense of timelessness that obliges the reader to go beyond the image and condition of Iranian women in the post-revolutionary era. In fact, it insists that we grapple with deeply-rooted cultural attitudes that have long placed women in a social subordination. ("Shahrnush Parsipur..." 2)

So much of the force of the characters stems from their liminal disposition. Whether Parsipur is overtly or accidentally manipulating time, the effect on the reader, as well as the narrative, is such that it focuses the rhetoric more exactly on the themes than the moments. Often the reader may not even be able to locate the events of the narrative until well into story, as is the case with the character of Mahdokht. Although through this entire first chapter it appears that Mahdokht is reflecting upon her current life in Tehran, she is already in the garden in Karaj where the rest of

¹¹ Curiously, the real Maria von Trapp, whose life story the film is based upon, did in fact marry the Georg von Trapp. Perhaps Parsipur heard this somewhere and was mixing up reality and cinema in her own life, much as her book bends reality and surrealism in it.

¹² During the February 14th, 2014 *Women without Men* Symposium, I asked Parsipur about this discrepancy. She admitted that she had merely mixed up dates and stories. Although she realized it right away, the effect it produced in squashing history appealed to her. She explained that in the present, time is quite loose; however as it moves further and further away into the past, moments begin to stick together and it becomes evermore difficult to discern exactly when certain things happened. This warping of time and space is particularly crucial in this scene as it is the first intersection of magic and realism in the text. Likely missed by most, it may sharply prick the minds of a canny reader who also happens to be a Julie Andrews fan.

the characters will eventually converge; hence the entire chapter is reminiscence. This is not apparent for another eight chapters of text.

After she muses on the film, Mahdokht thinks about orphanages she used to visit when in Tehran while she walks around the grounds. She strolls near the green house, drawn close when she hears peculiar noises coming from within. Upon keener inspection she sees the grounds keeper and one of the housemaids having sex. Mahdokht is appalled and rushes off. Soon the maid chases after her, catches up, and falls to her knees begging forgiveness. Mahdokht considers telling her brother about the affair, but knows that he would only beat then fire her, which would most likely result in the girl's brothers likely murdering her for disgracing the family honor. So Mahdokht keeps silent, reluctantly swayed by the girl's insistence that the grounds keeper has promised to marry her. However, he runs off in the morning and is never heard from again. Mahdokht regrets not telling on the girl and relishes the thought of her being murdered. In the midst of all this murderous musing, "[s]uddenly and unaccountably a thought came to Mahdokht's mind: my virginity is like a tree" (8).

Virginity, first mentioned here in the text, is woven through the bulk of the conflicts both within this book, as well as the political problems endured by its author. The Islamic Republic was offended by the frank exploration of this topic by Parsipur and used it as the fundamental cause for her works being banned. Although concerns about virginity constantly plague the minds of the women in the book, most of the time it is in such naïve terms that it would seem the Islamic Republic's issues with Parsipur had more to do with the presentation of Iran's women as ignorant than violating moral codes. The characters argue about whether their virginity is a hole or a curtain, seriously volley ridiculous notions about sexuality, and reveal the most simplistic

speculations about their own bodies that women half their ages have long abandoned – women reading the book in America, that is.

By the end of this chapter Mahdokht decides that she should plant herself in the Earth, like a tree, sprouting roots, then shoots and leaves. Her apprehension about exploring the world would be overcome by her the spreading across the globe as a species of tree:

Soon it would spread to the rest of the continent. Americans would buy shoots of it to plant in California and colder climates, although they would mispronounce it “Madokt.” Soon, as a result of widespread usage in other languages, the name would be corrupted to “Medok” or “Madok.” Four centuries from now etymologists would passionately argue that both the terms share the same root, “Madik,” and it was originally from Africa. The botanists on the other hand would raise objections that a cold-climate tree could not grow in Africa. (9)

Following this whimsical premonition about her proliferation across the planet and the philological conundrums it would inspire, the chapter ends with Mahdokht beating her head against a wall, sobbing that she wants nothing more than to become a tree.

Chapter 2 – Fa’iza

The opening sentence of this chapter gives one of the only two clear indications of when the stories are occurring: “After several days of doubt and hesitation Fa’iza made up her mind at four in the afternoon on August 5, 1953” (10). Although this date is not necessarily significant to a non-Iranian reader, it instantly explains the myriad references that Parsipur makes in the text about commotion in the streets. In 1953, the British and the CIA staged a coup to overthrow democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and reinstate Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (the Shah) as their puppet dictator. One of the tactics employed in staging this coup was the organization of large street protests and riots to undermine Mossadegh’s authority.

Throughout these first few chapters, Parsipur refers to chaos in the streets without ever explicitly explaining why or what is behind the troubles, only quietly throwing in 1953 a couple of times. The unfortunate recent history of Iran since 1953 coincides with several key dates in the timeline and transmission of this book that intensifies the effect of her ambiguous implications. She completed the book in 1978; however, parts were already published a few years prior.¹³ At this time, the streets of Tehran were again awash with the turmoil of the Islamic Revolution. When the book was finally published at the end of the 1980's, Iran had just lost nearly a half-million people in a war with Iraq (Hiro). Even when the film version was released in 2009, around the same time that the Green Revolution was attempting to undo the effects of the previous revolution, Shirin Neshat consciously exaggerated elements from the text to emphasize the cyclical nature of Iran's society. Neshat explains her choice in a 2009 interview:

In the novel, the political material is only in the background, but I expanded it and brought it forward. Selfishly, I found it very timely to revisit history and remind Westerners that the American and British governments were directly responsible for overthrowing a democratic system in Iran. The CIA organized the coup in 1953, which in turn paved the road for the Islamic Revolution in 1979. As far as I know, this is the only film made so far that tries to depict this monumental political moment. (Heartney)

Yet Neshat certainly could not have known in the years leading up to the film's eventual release at end of summer 2009 that a few months earlier Iranians would attempt to break the Islamic regime's stranglehold following a highly suspect re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The revolutionary streak that parallels the chronicle of this story certainly appears to persist. Perhaps this says more about Iran's recent political challenges than about the book's convoluted fate; nevertheless, the subtle references that Parsipur makes here and again at the

¹³ The first chapter, "Mahdokht," was published in the Iranian literary magazine *Alefba*, no. 5 in 1974 ("Shahrnush Parsipur," Mage). Ironically, it would also be the same chapter that Shirin Neshat would entirely omit from her film adaptation. What was the first taste of this work to the public would also be the element not availed when the story received its widest circulation as an internationally acclaimed, award-winning film.

beginning of the next chapter produce an ever louder echo as the story travels further around a world that continues to become smaller, more connected, and aware of itself.

The most significant ramification of the riots in the narrative occurs in this chapter when Fa'iza, a woman in her late twenties, decides that after several days of being stuck in her home to visit her friend Munis to get something off her chest. Her body grows warm as she wonders if Munis's brother Amir Khan will be there. She puts on a black chador and leaves the house despite her grandmother's warnings. When she enters the street she hears the demonstrations in the distance. Quickly she boards a cab and is told by the driver that they will have to take back streets and alleys. As they are driving, suddenly a man leaps on to the back of the cab and taps on the window with the butt of a knife. The driver hits his brakes, slams on the accelerator, and the man peels off the back of the cab. Soon they arrive at Munis's house. Fa'iza quickly jumps out of the cab, overpays the driver, and rushes toward the house. The maid, Alia, lets her in. As they walk, Fa'iza is anxious about whether Amir Khan will be there, alternating between "he'll be there, he won't be there" with each step, à la "he loves me, he loves not." When they reach the living room, Fa'iza is disappointed to find Munis alone, intently listening to the news on the radio. Munis, however, is quite happy to see her friend. Fa'iza does not hesitate to inquire about the family, in particular Amir Khan, and learns that the whole family has gone to Mashad on pilgrimage.

Munis steps out to get them some tea, leaving Fa'iza to think about how the shape of a person's face reveals their intelligence. She believes that the rounder a person's face, the stupider he or she is and given that her friend Munis "had a round face, like a moon, or an egg. For the past ten years she had thought of Munis as an imbecile" (15).

The maid serves them tea and soon Fa'iza breaks into the real reason for her visit. She asks Munis if she has seen Parveen lately, at one time their mutual friend but now Fa'iza's brother's wife. Fa'iza detests Parveen and explains how a conflict was recently played out between them over the quality of the meals they served at dinner parties they each hosted. First Fa'iza threw one to patch things up between Parveen and her brother who had separated briefly following an argument. The meal was a traditional Iranian cuisine with lamb and rice. Parveen reciprocated a month later but with a European menu, which Fa'iza believes was intended to upstage her efforts. So then Fa'iza throws another fete, but now she puts together her own European menu, even going so far as to serve vodka. All is going well during this dinner when Parveen has the gall to criticize the meal. Fa'iza recounts this for Munis:

“Without warning she turned to me and said ‘Foozy dear’—giving me a nickname, ‘Foozy,’ as if she couldn’t bring herself to call me by my full name—‘Foozy dear, let me tell you something. You don’t put sauce on filet mignon.’ She said it so loud the whole neighborhood could hear.”

“Really!”

“You can’t guess how that made me feel. ‘Who says you don’t put sauce on filet mignon?’ I asked. She said she’d heard it on the radio. I said I have read the instructions in a book. She said she’d also read it in a book. I said the book she read must have been garbage. (20)

As the two argue over the correct preparation for filet mignon, it is clear that neither really knows what she is talking about, and both are desperately attempting to save face while naively appearing cosmopolitan. Their posturing and trumping is done by removing themselves from the familiar and trying to relocate in the exotic while still maintaining a clear notion of selfhood. Much as in the first chapter where Mahdokht bemoans the misinterpretation of her name once spread across the globe as a tree, here Fa'iza feels ridiculed when Parveen shortens her name. Parveen's appropriation of this familiarity offends Fa'iza who is not interested in granting it to her and in fact expects exceeding deference. Both Mahdokht and Fa'iza yearn for a

cosmopolitanism, yet fear losing their identity in the process, especially when it appears to be robbed from them without their control.

The dinner ends and the men retire to the balcony, but Parveen stays back to trade jabs with Fa'iza. The subject of virginity is again brought up here when Parveen accuses Fa'iza of making out with Fetty, Parveen's brother. Parveen says, "'a woman who messes around with Fetty in the hall should think more of protecting her virginity curtain than throwing dinner parties.'" Fa'iza loathes Fetty and replies, "only the Angel of Death would mess around with your brother. The way he looks, only the Angel of Death would be interested in him. Secondly, virginity is not a curtain, it's an orifice, and you wouldn't know the difference after three kids" (21). Virginity here is used as the shell casing of ignorance that they fire back and forth at one another. Parveen has had children; she has long lost her virginity, yet the subject remains a fresh source of identification, condemnation, and judgment. What virginity represents in this book is an irretrievable sense of purity, ever out of reach, and thus all the more desired. The pure do not realize what they have, and eventually only sense something indescribable is lost. The women on both ends of the sexual spectrum in this book, the virgins and the mothers, struggle to express what virginity actually is to them.

Fa'iza tears deep into Parveen but they both go quiet as soon as the men return from the balcony. Munis, however, has lost the train of the story apparently caught up by whether virginity is a curtain or an orifice. That Munis and Fa'iza, at 33 and 28 years of age respectively, argue with such naïveté about their own bodies, reveals just how misguided and uninformed their society has kept them. Parsipur writes:

"According to my mother," Munis said softly, "the hymen is a membrane that can rip open, even if a girl falls from a height."

"What talk is that? Fa'iza said dismissively. "It's an orifice. It is constricted and it will expand as a result of penetration."

“Oh!” explained Munis, the color draining from her face. Alarmed, Fa’iza asked, “Something’s the matter?”

“No, no, it’s nothing. But it must be a membrane,” Munis insisted.

“No, dear woman,” Fa’iza said emphatically. “I have read it in a book.” I read a lot, you know. It is an orifice.” (22)

Again Fa’iza defers to a book for authority as she did with the *filet mignon*, in a sense conflating her knowledge of her own body to the same sort of foreignness as a so-called “European meal.” Alia brings the women more tea followed in by Amir Khan who enters complaining about the chaos outside. Fa’iza says she needs to go home and he insists that he drive her. She feigns a bit of resistance, but is actually thrilled to have time alone with him.

Chapter 3 – Munis (Part 1)

Munis is introduced in the previous chapter primarily as a sounding board for Fa’iza’s tirade about Parveen, but it is in the following three chapters that her character is fleshed out. The chapter opens with the second and final indication of time in the entire book: “At four o’clock in the afternoon on August 7, 1953, Munis was standing on the roof of the house watching the street below” (24). In the two days that have passed since Fa’iza visited her, Munis has not slept at all and her brother has forbidden her to leave the house. Her mind has been consumed with two things, the ever more intense demonstrations in the street and her virginity.

Parsipur writes:

From the roof she watched the street thick with crowds that seemed to be running back and forth, as if chasing each other. Then a convoy of trucks packed with people went by, followed by a procession of tanks. The sound of machine-gun fire could be heard from a distance.

Munis was thinking obsessively that for as long as she could remember she had looked at the garden through the window convinced that virginity was a delicate, vulnerable membrane. At the age of eight she had been told that God would not forgive a girl who lost her virginity in any way. Now, a couple of days ago she had learned that virginity was not a curtain but an orifice. Something had broken inside her and a cold rage penetrated her body. (24-25)

Parsipur ingeniously grafts the pell-mell street protests that pitted hired thugs, the military, and ordinary citizens against each other upon the confusion that Munis is feeling at this point in her life. Her knowledge of her most intimate parts and all that she had been taught about them have been blown apart.

She looks over the ledge of her roof onto the street and sees a man staggering with his hand pressed against his belly. The man falls head first into a ditch. Munis closes her eyes, leans forward, and falls to the pavement below. She lands facing up, eyes open, staring at the sky.

Chapter 4 – Munis (Part 2)

This chapter marks the clearest departure from any realist sensibility in the narrative and Parsipur overtly introduces the magical elements into her work. She writes, “At first Munis was dead. Or at least she thought she was. For the longest time she lay on the pavement, her eyes wide open. Gradually the blue of the sky darkened and tears began to flow down her face. She pressed on her eyes with her right hand and slowly rose to her feet. Her body felt sore and very weak” (26). Munis moves toward the man who had fallen into the ditch that she had seen moments before from the rooftop:

“Are you all right?” Munis asked.

“I’m dead,” the man answered.

“Can I help you in any way?”

“The best thing for you to do is leave. You might get into trouble.”

“Why?”

“Can’t you hear the noise? It is payback time.”

“So what are you doing here?” Munis wanted to know.

“Dear lady,” said the man, with a touch of impatience, “I told you. I am dead.” (26-27)

Munis continues to insist that there might be something she could do for the man, suggesting that if she could nurse him back from death, then perhaps her own condition would not be so final.

He makes a reference to a French screenplay titled “It Is Too Late,” indicating that he is at that point and she should just leave him alone.

She finally takes leave of the man and wanders around streets crowded with mobs of people. Munis watches them as their rage subsides and they return to their homes where she then peers in on them through windows as they get drunk. Eventually Munis reaches the university and explores the books in the windows of the stores. One title, not sold in the stores but by a street vendor, catches her eye and after a few days she musters the courage to buy *Sexual Fulfillment or How to Know Our Bodies*. She finds a deserted street and seeking refuge under a tree, she reads the book three times in its entirety over three days. Finally she looks up and feels that she has matured in some powerful way. Tossing the book into the gutter she heads home.

Alia, the maid, opens the door and is awe struck at the sight of Munis alive. She tells Munis that her family has been searching everywhere for her for the last month, to which Munis simply says that she is no longer the same person, and that she now knows a lot more.

Fifteen minutes later her brother Amir Khan comes home and freezes at the sight of Munis in the living room. He suddenly explodes in a rage, yelling how she has ruined the family reputation, that she is a shameless woman. Munis is utterly undaunted, saying innocently that she merely went for a short walk, which only enrages Amir Khan all the more.

“You knew you were not supposed to go out during the riots, you slut,” said Amir Khan, as he removed the belt from his waist and started beating Munis with it. For her part, Munis was taken aback by the violent outburst and suffered the strokes wordlessly without putting up a defense.

“Why are you beating me?” she said finally. “Are you a sadist?”

The words exacerbated Ami Khan’s fury. He reached for a knife on the dining table and plunged it forcefully in her chest.

With a faint sigh the spinster died for a second time. (29)

The first time Munis dies so softly she is not sure she is dead when she lands on the pavement, but the second time she is violently beaten and then stabbed to death by her brother, reminding

the reader of the foreboding fate that the maid, caught by Mahdokht having sex in the green house in the first chapter, would have suffered had her brothers learned of the affair.

Chapter 5 – Munis (Part 3)

Despite a gory segue, this chapter is embedded with a series of ridiculous and absurd moments that divulge a dark sarcasm laced throughout Parsipur's work. The story immediately continues from the last chapter with Alia hearing the commotion from the living room and rushing into the room to find Munis dead and a blood-soaked Amir Khan holding a knife. She faints and he quickly begins to regain his composure. He wipes his fingerprints off of the knife and at first puts it back on the table but then picks it up to put in his pocket.

The doorbell rings and Amir Khan goes to open it. His parents enter, saying they had gone to several police stations looking for Munis to no avail. All three of them go into the living room, nearly tripping over Alia's body still sprawled on the ground, before noticing Munis's corpse. The parents turn to each other, give a short yelp and fall over in a faint as well.

Amir Khan sits down to take it all in. He reaches into his pocket for a handkerchief to wipe his brow, soon realizing it is covered with blood, when the door bell rings again. This time it is Fa'iza who is taken aback when she sees the bloodied Amir Khan. Highlighting the absurdity of this situation he says to her, "'For God's sake don't you go and faint on me too'" (32). She does not faint and says she had only come to see if there was any word on Munis.

At a loss for words, he points toward the direction of the living room. Fa'iza goes in and sees all of the bodies strewn everywhere, but does not seem terribly shaken up by the discovery. Far more composed than the man she so loves, she simply asks him if he killed all of them. Amir

Khan finally has hit his limit and squats on the floor whimpering, wherein Fa'iza sees her opportunity to ensnare him:

The sight of the despondent man gave Fa'iza the notion that fate had finally put her on the highway of life. She took off her chador and tossed it in a corner and crouched directly in front of Amir Khan.

“Man, listen to me,” she addressed Amir Khan firmly. “This is an abomination. Why are you crying? You are a brother. You have honor, and a duty to protect it. You killed her? You did the right thing. Why not? She’d been gadding about for a whole month. No decent girl behaves like that. She was as good as dead. I’d do the same if I were you. Your mother has raised you nobly...” Fa’iza paused to produce a handkerchief from her bosom and give it to him to wipe off his tears. (32)

Rather than admonish him for murder or defend her friend, the desperate and lovelorn Fa’iza offers Amir Khan understanding and sympathy. Unfortunately, it is wasted on him. Although he is grateful for her support, “At the same time he thought it was unbecoming of a woman to keep a handkerchief between her breasts and squat before a man in a way that exposed her crotch. For a fleeting moment he thought that if Fa’iza had been his sister, he would have killed her for such indiscretion” (32-33).

The humor here ought not be lost in cultural or literal translation. This is an absurd situation, and all of the players are to varying degrees acting out repugnant circumstances that are far too common in their society. Amir Khan is at the same time a monster and a product of a certain cultural heritage in Iran. His profane understanding of his duty in his culture is to defend the family honor, especially if that honor is threatened from the inside, namely his sister. That he cannot explain why he beats her so savagely when she asks him, or that for an instant he feels murderous rage toward Fa’iza, shows just how tortuous it is to be him. There is no core to his anger. He is angry because it seems like that is what he is supposed to feel. His actions lack understanding, both of himself and the people with whom he is engaging. Fa’iza though for her part, especially in her exceedingly casual and opportunistic appraisal of the situation, embodies

the pitiable collusion with these sorts of “honorable” acts that her cultural heritage has inured her to accept, expect, and encourage even.

At Fa’iza’s suggestion, they carry Munis’s body out to the garden where they dig a hole and bury her. Then they return to the living room to clean it up. The garden seems to have enchanting properties, such that once Munis is interred therein, her recent appearance is entombed in the dirt with her. When everybody regains consciousness, both of the parents somehow fail to recall Munis’s corpse; instead they are delighted at the sight of Fa’iza. Only Alia senses something is missing, but being illiterate and rumored to have a ghostly twin who haunts people at night, she decides to keep quiet.

Fa’iza asks the parents if there is any word on Munis. They hasten to admit that they have heard nothing, but at some length implore Fa’iza to stay on for dinner. Following dinner Amir Khan takes her home.

In the car he was quiet and in a pensive mood. Fa’iza felt at ease enough to reach out and stroke his hand gripping the wheel. He showed no reaction.

“You know, after all this you should get married to put Munis’s disappearance behind us,” Fa’iza felt confident enough to suggest. “Besides,” she went on, “you need a wife to be your companion¹⁴ and confidante, to take care of you and give you solace and comfort.”

“Exactly!” said Amir Khan, “you are absolutely right.” (35)

A few days later, Amir Khan brings up the subject of marriage with his mother, quoting verbatim the words Fa’iza used with him in the car a few nights earlier. He says, “I have come to believe that I need a wife to be my companion¹⁵ and confidante, to take care of me and give me solace and comfort” (35). His mother is delighted at the thought, but surprised when he asks her to go

¹⁴ Although I will explore the details of the translation choices in more exacting detail in subsequent chapters, it bears noting that in the original, the word Parsipur employs here is “*munis*,” which literally means “companion.” Combined with the word “*anis*,” which means “confidante,” the words form a commonly used rhyming phrase (i.e. “*munis o anis*”). Amir Khan’s rather casual use of this phrase, revealing no ostensible discomfort with it being the name of his sister he just murdered, reinforces the detached acceptance of his actions as familial duty.

¹⁵ Again in the original Parsipur uses the word “*munis*” here.

arrange the marriage proposal according to Iranian custom, which requires the parent to first settle the marriage conditions. She had assumed that he was going to marry Fa'iza, but learns that Amir Khan intends to marry an eighteen-year-old girl who he believes is much more modest and chaste.

Again Parsipur underpins the absurdity of the situation by not so subtly drawing out the circumstances of this moment:

“Amir dear,” the mother said, with some concern in her voice, “you are in fact two years older than your late sister and pushing forty. You did not get married so that you could take care of your sister. Now why do you want to marry an eighteen-year-old? You know the saying, a young wife always attracts the neighbors. You may be asking for scandals.”

Amir was adamant. “But mother,” he said, “you’ve also heard the other saying: ‘A virgin past twenty, pity she needs aplenty.’ I have no choice but to marry someone below twenty. Besides, she looks very chaste and devout and not likely to be unfaithful. So why don’t you dress up and go for the proposal today. (36)

His mother submits. Together they visit the girl’s family, secure the arrangement that afternoon, and they even set the wedding date for the following Wednesday to avoid a several month delay that would be brought on by the impending religious observances.¹⁶

When they return home they tell Alia, who then slips out of the house and informs Fa'iza, who beats her head against a wall and punches through a window in her heartbreak. The two women then set out to dash this wedding through whatever means are at their disposal. First they visit a holy shrine, light some candles, and vow to slaughter a sheep. Then they visit a medium and buy a charm to thwart the formation of affection between the couple. Finally, they go to a celebrated psychic, “known for her pure spirit enabling her to see into the future by consulting an ancient, sacred book” (37). Books throughout this narrative appear as sources of absolute

¹⁶ For the months of Ramadan and Muharram life in Iran generally shuts down due to constant public religious ceremonies and prohibitions of social activities.

authority. They lend a tactile gravitas that is otherwise reserved for the ephemeral and enchanted elements in the ether.

The psychic takes their money, speaks some ominous incantations, and offers Fa'iza the following spell: "To remove this burden of love, the virgin must for seven nights take seven steps in the direction of Mecca, and then retrace her steps and intone with each step, 'Dear God, protect me from satanic temptations.' She should then wash her feet before going to bed and leave her feet uncovered by the bedclothes" (38). Still Fa'iza is unsatisfied and demands a charm or a more powerful spell, to which the psychic chuckles and tells her that in truth there is nothing she can do for her.

Not to be swayed by even the psychic's frank admission, Fa'iza obeys her instructions for the next seven nights, all to no avail as the wedding is not called off. On the night of the wedding, Fa'iza goes to Amir Khan's house and decides to bury the charm she bought from the medium next to Munis's grave.

As she begins digging in the ground, she hears a soft voice calling her name. She looks around and sees nobody. Fa'iza tries to carry on but in a few moments she hears the voice again:

"Fa'iza dear, I can't breathe," it said.

Fa'iza made no response.

"I'm very hungry. I'm dying of thirst," she heard the voice say. "I haven't had anything to eat for a long time."

Reflexively and feverishly Fa'iza began to claw at the dirt, digging into the grave. She stopped when Munis's round face was exposed. The eyes opened and the lips began to move. "Dear sister, give me a little water." (39)

Fa'iza rushes to fetch some water from the pool in the garden. She then uncovers the rest of Munis's body as she rises from her grave, goes into the kitchen, and gorges herself with food. She drinks buckets of water from the well, disrobes, and jumps into the pool washing her body

while Fa'iza runs back to Munis's still untouched room and retrieves some clothes. After Munis is dried off and dressed, they sit together in living room. Munis starts the conversation:

“So you partnered with my brother to kill, you shameless ingrate!” she began.

Fa'iza tried hopelessly to explain and justify her involvement. Munis remained unmoved. “So you always thought I was an idiot because I have a round face,” she said.

“What? Who ever thought that?” Fa'iza responded vehemently.

“You! You bastard,” returned Munis.

“I swear on the grave of the Holy Prophet I never thought that.”

“Don't even try to fool me,” Munis said with a steady stare. “I can read your mind now. Not only did you think I was stupid because of my round face, you also thought you could exploit my simplicity and work your way into marrying my brother. Isn't that so?” (40-41)

Dismissing Fa'iza's objections, Munis takes the girl to task. Munis says that despite some inherent filth to Fa'iza's nature, she still wants to take her along to set up an organization that will prevent other brothers from killing their sisters.

Munis then sets about to set the record straight with all of the people in her life. Finishing off with Fa'iza, Munis tells her that she cannot lie to her anymore, especially about sexual affairs because now Munis has also read a book; she also informs Fa'iza that Parveen is in fact a better cook than she is. They then wait for the wedding party to return. The capstone in Munis's triumph over Fa'iza is secured: more than all of the psychic power she now commands, she has also read a book. She knows more than Fa'iza because she can read her mind and know everything she knows; however, Fa'iza cannot do the same in return. To conclusively punctuate that she now lords over her previously domineering friend, Munis stabs at the very core of Fa'iza's pride, her cooking.

Some hours later the wedding party comes home. Amir Khan is incredibly drunk and directed to the bedroom with his bride by the guests. Suddenly Alia notices Munis and screams. Then everybody notices her. Munis says nothing and makes her way to Amir Khan's bedroom

and unlocks the door. She enters and although Amir Khan can barely stand, he is clearly aghast at the sight of her. The bride is confused. Munis addresses her brother:

“You miserable wretch, why are you so drunk?”

“What can I say? I am.”

“So you married an eighteen-year-old because she is pristine and chaste?”

“Yes.”

“And you,” Munis turned to the girl. “Didn’t you get knocked up last year by your cousin? And didn’t you have an abortion by Mrs. Fatemi?”

The young woman nearly lost her balance, but Munis caught her before she collapsed. “Enough of these theatrics,” Munis told her. “It was at the suggestion of this very Mrs. Fatemi that you got my stupid brother drunk tonight, wasn’t it?” Without waiting for an answer, she turned to Amir.

“And you, bastard,” she hissed, “You must live and make do with her. If you raise your hand to her, or hurt her in any way, I will return and swallow you whole. Do you understand?” Amir nodded in the affirmative.

“I am going to live with Fa’iza. That poor woman, though a little full of herself, was at least a virgin, and this one isn’t. This is what happens to stupid men.” (44-45)

It appears that virginity here is employed as a metric for the value of a man as well as the woman with whom he ends up. As Munis leaves, Amir bemoans his fortune and the bride closes the door, locking Amir in with her. Munis makes her way through the crowd of people and tells Fa’iza that they are now going to Karaj. Alia asks to be taken with them, but Munis simply says “Later, later” (45). They leave a dazed and silent crowd in their wake.

This final segment closes the Tehran portion of the story for Munis, Fa’iza, and Amir Khan in this first half of the book.

Chapter 6 – Mrs. Farrokhlaqa Sadroddin Golchehreh

The matriarch of the story is found in the character of Farrokhlaqa, a fifty-one-year-old aristocrat who resents her husband, Golchehreh, for forbidding her from exploring her artistic temperament. She feels she wasted much of her youth and inspiration facilitating his pursuits at

the expense of her own, most regrettably forsaking her one true love with a man named Fakhroddin.

Like most of the chapters, this one also opens in a garden, with Farrokhlaqa relaxing in a chaise longue. The chapter vacillates between recollections from various moments in Farrokhlaqa's life intermixed with her immediate attempts to ignore Golchehreh's efforts to crush her nostalgizing as he putters about. Her first reminiscences recall her father who died a decade earlier and left her with a few words of doubt regarding her husband. "'My dear girl,' he said two days before his death, 'I have my reservations about the man.' He said that, and died two days later" (46).

Golchehreh is in their bedroom dawdling through his daily affairs. He has recently retired, and with a surplus of time on his hands, he spends much of his day around the house driving Farrokhlaqa mad. Although some kernel of love remains between them, decades of resentment and suspicion layer on top, Parsipur writes:

He did not cherish face-to-face encounters with his wife. On those occasions Golchehreh could only grin contemptuously and feel an intense dislike for her in his heart. But in her absence, or as he now watched her reflection in the mirror, he felt an overwhelming tenderness for her and loved her more than anything or anybody, a far cry from the deep set, thirty-year-old resentment he felt when they were in close proximity to each other. (47)

While laying about and thinking about her past, Farrokhlaqa imagines herself as Vivien Leigh in *Gone with the Wind*, which brings her to think about Fakhroddin, the man she has most loved through her life. Her thoughts of him begin with a recollection of a night when he had recently returned from a trip to America. She is just beginning to relish her memories when her husband, straying from his routine, distracts her. Usually he would clean up and take long afternoon walks but on this day he was staying at home longer than normal. "His wife looked forward to his absence so she could move around freely. With him in the house, she felt restricted and

claustrophobic—a need to confine herself to a corner to avoid contact. In the thirty-two years of their marriage she had learned to be inactive when her husband was home. Instinctively she felt vitality and joy in his absence” (48). After avoiding a spat with her husband about whether he ought to shave in the bedroom in front of the mirror that allows him to spy on her in the reflection or in the bathroom, she returns to thoughts of that night with Fakhroddin.

Farrokhlaha has known Fakhroddin since she was thirteen, but married Golchehreh when she was nineteen. The night that she is recalling she is twenty-three years old. The two have not seen one another in a long time and while she is alone outside, he finds her and compares her to Vivien Leigh. Quickly he makes several romantic overtures to her and says he wishes she had not married. At the peak of their bliss, Golchehreh appears, and Fakhroddin tells him that he was discussing *Gone with the Wind* with Farrokhlaha, suggesting they definitely see it. Golchehreh is absolutely unmoved. Although silent all the ride home while in the car with his uncle, once in the privacy of his home with Farrokhlaha, Golchehreh stays up the rest of the night insulting and attacking Fakhroddin for being so foolish and enamored with America. However, all he really manages to do is bolster Farrokhlaha’s longing for Fakhroddin and her loathing for her husband.

The story returns to the present with Golchehreh having completed his shave. He gathers his stuff, cleans up a bit and then leaves the bathroom. Standing directly behind his wife, not knowing what to do with himself, he defaults to his habit of rebuke:

They exchanged glances reflecting their mutual distaste for each other.
“You’ll be fifty-one next month,” said Golchehreh casually, as if
expressing a random thought. “You’ll be menopausal, Fakhur Dear.”
She stared at him for a long moment, knowing that he was intent on
tormenting her. (53)

Farrokhlaha tries to avoid a confrontation but he is insistent. He admonishes her for wanting to leave Tehran for an orchard in Karaj, taunting her about being too old to tend a garden, while he

might still want to have a few more children by other women. Parsipur continues to capitalize on the garden as a metaphor for all of life, physical and metaphysical. Farrokhlaqa may no longer be able to have children, but in denying her a garden, Golchehreh refutes her admission to paradise, joy, and love. And although her ability for maternal happiness has expired, he, as a man, can continue to spread his seed, harvesting his garden until his dying day. This unbalanced social condition holds through in Parsipur's overt indictment of the Islamic allowance for men to have multiple wives. Golchehreh belittles his wife for being menopausal, and even though he is old as well, he can still have children, thus conjuring a rationale for acquiring a newer, younger wife:

Golchehreh felt increasingly irritable without knowing why. He suddenly asked, "In menopause, do women undergo an emotional shift as well?"

"I don't know."

"It must be so," he speculated. "That is why polygamy is allowed for a man so he won't have to put up with a menopausal woman in his bed for the rest of his life."

"Perhaps," said Farrokhlaqa. (56)

Farrokhlaqa manages to ignore her husband long enough to return to her memories about the night she met Fakhroddin's American wife at a dinner party. She was a blonde woman with blue eyes who did not speak a word of Persian.

Farrokhlaqa then recalls years later when at a retreat with a friend she confides that during World War II she carried on an eight-year affair with Fakhroddin while Golchehreh was off in Poland, and was likely also running around with women behind her back. It is unclear whether she adds this last bit as justification for her infidelity or simply to enrich the context of her story. When the war ended, Fakhroddin returned to America with his wife and died five months later in a car crash.

Stranded in her life with Golchehreh she returns to her present moment, still wondering when her husband, having dressed, shaven, and finished reading the paper, would finally leave the house for the day.

Farrokhlaqa persisted in her awkward silence. Her husband grew impatient and asked, “Don’t you want the paper?” She reached out wordlessly and took it out of his hand. She then lit a cigarette.

“You mustn’t smoke,” her husband warned. “At your age and with menopause coming you’ll seriously hurt yourself.” (58)

Although he once again chides his wife, it seems as if he doing it less as an attack than as his sole and final means of maintaining some sort of communication with her. He wants to be kind but does not seem to know how. Much like Amir Khan in the previous chapters who beats his sister to death in a blind rage, fueled by what he believes to be his duty, Golchehreh has for so long been just one way that he would not even know how to begin thinking differently.

During the February 14th *Women without Men* Symposium, Parsipur explained that although the title of her book is *Women without Men*, and the protagonists, with the exception of the Kind Gardener, are all women, the men in her book are no less lacking. She did not apologize for their savagery, brutality, or hostility, but did indicate that the entire society is suffering. It is from this stance that she vociferously refuses to be labeled a feminist. It would be a great disservice to her work to see it as a call for sensitivity solely to the plight of suppressed women. A circumspect analysis of this work reveals that she is critical of any system that would impose on its men so vacuous a core and on its women too often a bloodied testament to that emptiness. The antagonists so far, Amir Khan and Golchehreh, do not appear to have much agency behind their actions, really more reacting in some programmatic way than driven by authentic, self-actualized beliefs.

Following his jabs at his wife and a bit more procrastination, Golchehreh finally decides to go for his walk. Before he leaves, he stands in front of Farrokhlaqa and feels a surge of affection long buried deep within beyond reach. “He stood in front of her, thinking for a moment that it was no longer necessary to wear that sarcastic grin when looking at her. He realized that the grin was his defensive barrier against her overwhelming desirability. Suddenly he did not feel the need for this barrier” (58-59).

He follows her as she leaves the room and catches her on the landing at the top of the stairs. And in a soft tone says to her, “Farrokhlaqa darling.”

There was a tremor of surprise in the woman. He had never addressed her in those terms. He always called her by a nickname. And that loathsome grin was not there. Instead there was in the tone of his voice a trace of what sounded like genuine affection. She shuddered with fear. She was certain there was an evil intention behind all this. “What if he wants to kill me?” she thought to herself. (59)

So used to abuse and resentment, confused by his instantaneous reversal, in a moment of pure panic Farrokhlaqa punches him in the gut. He loses his balance and tumbles down the stairs to his death. What a thing is called again reveals the interpersonal relationship underlying the actions of the characters. Whereas with Mahdokht and Fa’iza, their concern was about the belittling of their identities, Farrokhlaqa has become so accustomed to her husband’s degradation that it is when he actually addresses her with sincere affection that she is discombobulated. A thing being called its true name can be just as jarring being profaned.

Three months later, while still mourning the death of her husband she hears from a real estate agent in Karaj that there is a villa with an orchard available. She sells her house in Tehran, buys the villa and moves there.

So much of the force of the text lurks in the casual relationship that everybody seems to have with tragedy and trauma: It is simply the way of the world that bad things happen.

Character, though, is revealed in the ways people respond. The second half of this book is the response by all of these characters to that which happens to them in the first half.

Chapter 7 - Zarrinkolah

Of all of the characters in this book, Zarrinkolah's story is the most universally tragic, although her name would suggest otherwise as "*zarrin*" means "golden" and "*kolah*" means "hat." She does in essence wear a golden hat, as regardless of where she is or what she is going through, a bright disposition shines upon her and from her, eventually consuming her entirely. A lifelong prostitute, her experiences resonate with global audiences regardless of their familiarity with the nuances of Iran's particular brand of misogyny and discrimination. Parsipur writes:

Zarrinkolah had lived [in the brothel] since puberty. In the early years she had three or four customers a day, but now at twenty-six, she serviced twenty, twenty-five, even thirty customers a day. Several times she had complained to Akram [the brothel's madam/owner] about the pressure of the work, but all she got was a tongue lashing, and once even a beating. She had learned her lesson. (61)

A joyful person at heart, Zarrinkolah is trapped in the brothel in some ways because of her affability. The other women like her so much that when she once thought about leaving and discussed it with them, they ratted her out to Akram, and that thought was thoroughly beaten out of Zarrinkolah. When she was nineteen, a bricklayer had offered to marry her, but before he could fulfill his proposal, a shovel smashed in his skull during a fight. Violence marks Zarrinkolah's being in every possible way, and yet still she somehow responds to it all with a cheery optimism.

Resigned to her fate, she tries to just go about her business and do her best to lift the spirits of the people in her life. However, for the last six months she has been suffering a severe problem that makes carrying on quite impossible. One Saturday morning while eating her

breakfast, she was called upon by Akram to service a customer. Zarrinkolah ignored the madam for a few minutes, but after several sharp yells she finally gave up on breakfast and went back to her room laid on her bed, and parted her legs.

The customer came into the room. It was a man with no head. She was so frightened she couldn't scream. She submitted to him frozen with fear. He finished his business and left. That day all of her customers were headless. She kept it to herself afraid that she might be accused of being possessed by evil spirits. (63)

Zarrinkolah resists discussing this issue with any one until a fifteen-year-old girl is newly brought into the house. Feeling somehow comforted by the child's innocence, Zarrinkolah says she can no longer bear the weight of this secret and has to confide in somebody. Upon hearing about the headless men, the young girl is incredulous, but nevertheless agrees to tell Zarrinkolah if she notices any men also lacking heads. Confirming Zarrinkolah's fears, it is only she who sees all men as headless.

Feeling the need for absolution, Zarrinkolah requests a two-day leave from Akram and goes to a local bathhouse. She pays an attendant to scrub her again and again until she is raw and the woman, believing Zarrinkolah insane, can no longer continue. Zarrinkolah gives the woman a large tip and asks to learn the process of devotional ablution. She then goes on to repeat the ritual nearly fifty times.

She is almost ready to visit a holy shrine, but is overcome by "an urge to prostate herself, naked as she was, in prayer and plead for God's grace. It occurred to her that she did not remember the required formalities and incantations for such an appeal. She then remembered Imam Ali and his Agony in telling his secrets to a well. She thought of invoking his name and asking for his intercession with God on her behalf" (65). So desperate for purification, yet having lived all of her life in a brothel, she only knows the depths of pollution. In this sequence,

Parsipur brutally juxtaposes these two apogees of the Iranian/Muslim identity, purity and pollution, ultimately leaving Zarrinkolah on her knees in the bathhouse, naked, crying, wailing “Ali, Ali, Ali” repeatedly with her head pressed on the floor.

The one chapter that is quite devoid of any mention of virginity is this one, but it is precisely because of this stark absence that it ought to draw so much attention. Her virginity, ravaged from her so early in life, was likely never even something she knew she was supposed to be mindful of guarding. Her cheerful demeanor conceals the aporia of spirit that bubbles out of her being and occludes her comprehension of the world around her. This entire chapter unfolds as a meditation on emptiness and disappearance, including Zarrinkolah’s own dissolution as a character. From the day she stops seeing heads, she gradually begins to dissolve herself, figuratively and literally. Like Golchehreh and Amir Khan, Zarrinkolah is also at a loss for how to behave, so she *imitates* what she believes to be the ritual and ultimately out of desperation, in her own blind rage, begs God for help.

Zarrinkolah is told that the bathhouse is closing for the night and she needs to leave. She dresses and walks to the shrine, finding that it has closed already for the day. She sits on the grass near the entrance and weeps. In the morning, her eyelids are swollen from all her crying. No longer compelled to enter the shrine, instead feeling “light as air, like a piece of straw being carried along by the wind,” she buys some food from a street vendor and asks him where one may get some respite from the late-summer heat (66). He peers at her face, unable to ignore her bloodshot eyes, and suggests that Karaj is not bad.

The chapter ends with Zarrinkolah heading to Karaj, all traces of her life as a prostitute washed from her face in a deluge of tears.

Except for the Kindly Gardner who is the only significant male character in the entire text and will be introduced in the next chapter, all of the principal characters have now been introduced. Each of these women struggles with some unique manifestation of a deep existential emptiness and believes that relief can be found in Karaj, where as the story develops they will be drawn together.

Although Parsipur employs a magical realist style to express the nuances of the women's conflicts, the roots of their problems are actual realities endured by women in Iran. The use of this literary convention allows Parsipur to present the intangible complexities of the women's lives. Problems either lacking discernible or available solutions thus gather in a crepuscular zone that prevents their resolution. Parsipur sends her characters to this quasi-magical space in Karaj, a town without any particular allegorical significance in and of itself, other than often being a convenient recourse from the fatigue, filth, and fury of Tehran life. It is not the city of Karaj that is critical, but rather the special community they form there together that becomes a quasi-magical space.

Chapter 8 – Two Women on the Road.

Although all of the women end up in Karaj, the only ones we actually see make the voyage are Munis and Fa'iza. As important as the voyage itself is, just as critical is their condition. Parsipur opens the chapters as follows: "At sunset two women, one twenty-eight and the other thirty- eight years old, both wearing chadors, were walking along the highway to Karaj. They were both virgins" (67). About eighteen miles into their hundred-mile journey a truck stops near them and two of the three people disembark. The driver, who is quite drunk, and his assistant approach the two women.

“Where are you ladies heading?” Asked the driver when he reached the women,

The twenty-eight-year-old, Fa’iza, promptly came up with the answer, “We are going to Karaj to live by the fruits of our own labor and not to have any men to order us around.”

“Is that so?” said the driver. “Are you serious?” He suddenly reached for her chador and pulled it off her head.”

“What the hell,” she yelled with a mixture of fear and surprise. “Help! Help!”

At once the men attacked the women and a struggle ensued. The woman named Fa’iza continued to resist and scream as she was forced to the ground. The other, named Munis, quit fighting and remained inert. (68)

After about fifteen minutes, the men stop raping the two women and get up. They dust themselves off and casually head back to their truck, joking with one another about the quality of the experience, even thanking the women on their way.

When they board their truck, the passenger asks if anything happened while the driver and his assistant were out. They blow him off, saying it was none of his business, and then ask:

“What is it to you, anyway? Are you a policeman?”

“No I’m a gardener. They call me ‘Kind Gardener.’”

“Hey, Kind Gardener,” the driver said, amused, “we were irrigating the fields.”

The driver and his assistant were hugely amused by the comment. They broke out into laughter. The driver was laughing so hard that he lost control of the steering wheel and the truck began to swerve wildly on the highway. (69)

About to hit another car head-on, the driver jerks the wheel hard and the truck hurls off of the road, bashing through one tree but getting stuck at a second one. The passenger door opens and the assistant is thrown out just in time to have the truck roll over atop him. The driver bursts through the windshield, with the Kind Gardener soaring behind him out of the cabin to a soft and safe landing on some mud by the side of the road. The driver though flies toward some nearby power lines and instinctively grabs them, instantly getting electrocuted to death.

The Kind Gardener rises from the mud and sees the dead men strewn about and exclaims, “Oh, villainous creatures!” and starts walking toward Karaj (70).

With this chapter we see a fantastical element of Parsipur's work playing out where any man who threatens or causes one of the women to suffer, quickly experiences his comeuppance. There is an intriguing balance that she strikes throughout the text with the various binaries: men and women, pollution and purity, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, transgression and accounting, realism and surrealism. The author diligently manipulates the tone of the narrative such that the deft seriousness of the subject matter is offset by strange moments of comical relief that underscore the absurdity of these women's lives. She is constantly pushing and pulling, pricking and prodding the reader to laugh while horrified, snicker aghast, or weep joyfully. The sense of not knowing how to react or respond appears to infect the reader much as it has so many of the characters.

Chapter 9 – Farrokhlaqa's Garden (Part 1)

With all of the characters brought together, this chapter and the next create the climax of the narrative. Given the enchanted traditions and significance of gardens in Iranian literature, this space creates another binary between the inside and outside lives of the women, within the garden and their shared community against everything that came before and will follow after.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the garden not just as a metaphor in Persian literature, but as a focal point in all Persian arts from carpet weaving to the painting of miniatures to ancient engravings on stone and metal objects. Khansari et al locate the very core of Persian life as sprouting from the garden:

The Persian garden [...] stands in opposition to its landscape. It would be incomplete without its setting, for the garden is experienced as much for what it is not as for what it is. Outside its high walls—and the garden is always walled—may brood barren mountains and vast expanses of pitiless desert; if, as is often the case, the garden is in a city, the walls shield it from the dust and clamor of crowded, baking streets.

Within, all is calm. The garden becomes the still point in a turning world, a field of constant, subtle change held in delicate balance by manmade design. [...]

It is here [in the garden] rather than in houses that Persian life is fully lived. Few people cherish gardens more; in few cultures are its images so pervasive. From the beginning, its water and trees, its flowers and birds informed Persian religion, imagination, language, and arts, and this was so no matter who the ruler or what the belief. It is as if a great flowering vine stretched back through the millennia; blossom, leaf, and tendril unbroken by the swings of a turbulent and often tragic history. (12,17)

The reverberations of the garden's centrality to Persian culture are intensified in light of the Sufi influence on Persian society and culture. Nasr explains:

The traditional Islamic garden is an earthly reflection of Paradise, and the word *paradise* itself comes the Middle Persian word *paradīs*, meaning garden, and is also the origin of the Arabic word *firdaws*, meaning paradise and garden. Using the symbol of the garden, the Quran refers to Paradise itself as the Garden. Moreover, the Sacred Text speaks of levels of Paradise. The Sufis have drawn from this symbolism and speak of the Garden as designating not only the various levels of paradisaical realities but also the Divine Reality beyond Paradise as usually understood. The highest Garden is associated with the absolute Truth, which is one of the Names of the Divine Essence. (xv)

The Persian garden, even irrespective of these lofty theological invocations, represents a sanctuary free from the chaos outside of its walls. Not intended to mock paradise, so much as to create one within everyday reach, the garden is the last bit of home a person would see before leaving for their day and the first taste of comfort upon their return.

This quotidian path from the home through the garden and into the outside world and back again, as well as the spiritual one, is echoed in the narrative of this text. *Women without Men* follows these women's travels from Tehran to Karaj, into the Garden, and then back into the world. Their journey quite poignantly aligns with the four stages of the Sufi's journey, "from creation to God, the journey in God, the journey back from God to His creation, and finally the journey in creation with God" (Nasr 227). Parsipur further embeds mystical and Sufi themes in her narrative by naming the single male protagonist "The Kind Gardner," for "[t]he Sufis also

speak of the Gardener as God in His absolute and infinite Reality” (Nasr xv). It is important to be mindful of these spiritual intersections when analyzing this book because they all reveal the depth of allusions embedded in Parsipur’s work. She aligns with a magical realist genre indebted more to Sufism and classical Persian literature than to anything from the modern or Western world. *Women without Men* is a thoroughly Iranian book.

The ninth chapter opens with Farrokhlaqa and her real estate agent, Ostovary, being driven to her villa in Karaj by her driver Mosayeb. Although he has told her about almost all aspects of the property, Ostovary is anxious about his client’s reaction to the tree. The property must be a source of some curiosity as the driver also only comes to see it for himself, as apparently Farrokhlaqa could have driven herself.

Before they have even entered the grounds, Ostovary spills a litany of laudable qualities about the property. As they begin walking around the grounds, Farrokhlaqa does her best to suppress her excitement. When they inspect the house, she is not impressed and feels it looks rather quickly and cheaply put together. However, Ostovary, in seeming anticipation of her likely unimpressed reaction, quickly offers various remedies for the property’s deficiencies. A coat of stucco on the building, an additional level, another bathroom, a staircase – he is clearly prepared with a trove of renovation ideas.

Ostovary’s encouragement, however, is not needed. Farrokhlaqa is already taken with the place despite Ostovary’s anxiety. Quickly imagining how to improve the place so she can regularly host salons attended by all sorts of artists and creative types to make up for the three decades of her husband’s suppression,

She had already decided on adding a second floor and fancied an expanded, dynamic social life with friends coming to visit on weekends and holidays. Thirty-two years of living with a cranky, temperamental man had lost her many friends. But that might be a blessing, she could initiate new friendships and

associations of her own choice, with artists, writers, scholars, turning her parlor into a salon in the fashion of high-class ladies of the eighteenth-century Paris she had read about in novels. (73)

Even here Farrokhlaqa seeks to imitate European salons. Oppressed for so long, she does not know what an artistic life would look like to her anymore. Throughout the text, Parsipur often amplifies the Western envy that the characters feel. The characters imagine themselves as Vivien Leigh and Julie Andrews; they worry about how Americans will mispronounce their names; they try to impress their social circles by making *filet mignon*; and even a man dying in the streets after being knifed refers to some French existential text. Parsipur contrasts the extreme Iranian-ness of her narrative with these blips from the world to both emphasize the uniquely Iranian aspects of the story she is telling, as well as to contextualize these women's experiences as a reality not necessarily restricted to some mystical zone called Persia that does not exist on any maps but ancient ones. So when Farrokhlaqa slips into one her musings about what her life would have been like if she had lived somewhere other than Iran, she conveys an extreme longing to be her Iranian self, but in some foreign landscape. It is not that she renounces her culture or identity, but wonders how different it might have been if the garden of her life had no walls to keep her in and so much else out.

After walking around the house for a bit, Farrokhlaqa, Ostovary, and the driver begin to explore the grounds. Ostovary stops at various trees and makes suggestions or offers insights about them. Although Farrokhlaqa has already decided to buy the property and Ostovary does not need to keep trying to sell it, she allows him to carry on with his spiel. Soon their tour reaches a fast flowing river that forms the property line on one side, and Farrokhlaqa notices the tree agitating Ostovary's nerves.

[...] her attention was drawn to the tree, finding it hard to believe that it was real. "Who is that?" she asked in amazement. Ostovary, who had anticipated this

moment with dread, tried to answer as casually as possible: “Actually ... this is a human being. But I promise you,” he continued, trying to reassure his client, “she is the most harmless person you’ll ever meet in your life.” (74)

Ostovary then begins to explain the story behind the tree. He says that a woman disappeared the previous autumn and despite months of searching to no avail, the family came back to the house for the summer and found that she had planted herself in the ground. Ostovary fears that Farrokhlaqa will back out of the deal upon hearing the story of the tree. At first, Farrokhlaqa is confused and says, ““But this is not going to work. She needs to be taken to an asylum”” (75).

However, he works hard to summon her sympathies by complimenting her kind nature, yet at the same time he is genuinely moved by the tragedy that is in fact the story of Mahdokht, the protagonist of the first chapter:

“I haven’t cried in twenty years, but every time I see this poor woman I cannot hold back my tears. Any way, no matter how hard they tried, they couldn’t get her out of the ground. And she pleaded with them ‘Please, don’t cut me down. Let me grow.’”

“But she hasn’t sprouted any branches,” Farrokhlaqa observed.

“No, not yet,” he said, “although she has spread roots and perhaps she’ll grow leaves by next year.” (76)

Farrokhlaqa asks about the girl’s family and Ostovary explains that they are shamed by what she has done to herself and as such have agreed to sell the property for cheap if they can remain anonymous. Farrokhlaqa sees no cause for such embarrassment, as there is no shame in becoming a tree. Ostovary is not so sure, saying:

“A sane person does not turn into a tree. One must be insane like this poor soul for the transformation to take place. The poor brother was crying when he told me, ‘Soon people will find out about my sister becoming a tree and start making fun of us, for example calling us the Arbormans, Arborson, and so on, or cover our walls with graffiti, and ruin the century-old reputation of our family.’” (76)

In the book there are three occasions where Parsipur twists names to present the identity struggles her characters experience in a global as well as local landscape.¹⁷ In the first chapter, Mahdokht thinks about how her name will be butchered when she becomes a tree that proliferates throughout the world. Fa'iza is angered in the second chapter when her sister-in-law calls her by a nickname without permission. And here Mahdokht's brother is concerned about the ridicule his family will suffer when it is discovered that his sister has gone mad and become a tree. In all of these cases, the characters express a deep concern over the loss of their identity as manifested in their names, in particular by those outside of the realm of intimate understanding. Mahdokht worries about how people around the world will not be able to say her name correctly. Fa'iza does not trust Parveen and believes that she is intentionally reducing her name, not intent upon enlarging their familiarity, but to enrage and further alienate her. Mahdokht's brother thinks that people will associate his family's hard earned reputation with insanity.

Nomenclature has always been a luxury of the powerful over the weak, the rich over the poor. To name something is to own that thing, as Nietzsche explains, "The lordly right of giving names extends so far that one should allow oneself to conceive the origin of language itself as an expression of power on the part of the rulers; they say 'this *is* this and this,' they seal every thing and event with a sound and, as it were, take possession of it" (462). In a culture as focused on appearance, shame, and propriety as Iran's, what something is called is often more important than what it may actually be. In each of these cases where the characters' names are abused in some way, the very being of that individual is critically injured, precisely because they are being

¹⁷ Although in "Farrokhlaqa" (Chapter 7), Parsipur aggravates Farrokhlaqa through name play as well, in that situation the character is thrown by her husband not calling her by some nickname for the first time in decades, cf. 41. In "Farrokhlaqa's Garden, part two" (Chapter 10), Farrokhlaqa refers to herself in a poem she is writing as "Fari"; however, this name play is in service to the rhyme and meter she is trying to achieve. She retains authority and agency in that context. Whereas in these three other examples, the characters' hostile responses follow their actual names being minimized, degraded, or in some basic way changed.

renamed. If naming something is to lord over it, then to rename an already named thing is to assume ownership over what previously had a self and master, ideally one in the same.

Despite Ostovary's worries that Farrokhlaqa will be disturbed by the tree, she feels the exact opposite. In fact, as she studies the tree, she soon begins to experience a bond with her, which quickly flashes into a moment of inspiration; all the while, Ostovary continues to appeal to her considerate nature. She suddenly sees the tree as a wonderful stroke of opportunity for her to enter the world's stage. "Not only could she build an entire literary movement around her, but she could also elevate herself to leadership positions in the political arena" (77). Soon the opportunity transcends from providence to entitlement:

The fact that she had come to own it, meant that she was superior to others in native intelligence, intellectual capacity, spiritual and physical fitness. Others did not deserve to possess a human-tree because they did not have the capacity to understand the significance of the "human-tree." Not that she herself fully understood the existential implications of owning a human-tree, but intuitively she knew that the tree would bring her fame and fortune. (78)

Not only does she decide to take the property along with the tree, but moves in that night and immediately begins the renovations. Despite Ostovary's objections about her moving into an empty, somewhat dilapidated home, Farrokhlaqa is intent upon personally overseeing the project right away.

Just then there is a knock on the door of the villa. Mosayeb opens the door to find a man, the Kind Gardener, and a woman, Zarrinkolah, standing there. The man asks if they need a gardener for the property. Farrokhlaqa jumps out from behind Mosayeb and says that, in fact, they do. She asks him if he can do construction as well, and he says he can do it all. She then asks about the woman with him, whether she is his wife. He says, "I met this poor woman on the Karaj highway, confused, not knowing where she was. When she saw me she screamed and threw herself at my feet, crying. I asked her why she cried and kissed my feet. She said I was the

first man she'd seen in six months that had a head" (80). Farrokhlaqa inquires if she is crazy and the Kind Gardener says that he does not think so. She just followed him. Farrokhlaqa asks her how she could contribute to the home – whether she can cook, clean, or wash dishes. To all of which Zarrinkolah says she cannot yet, but she can learn these things. But what she can do is tell stories and sing songs, and that although she is young, she has an ocean of experience.

Farrokhlaqa then asks the Kind Gardener about his "real" name and he says, "“What is the point of knowing my real name? Everyone calls me ‘Kind Gardener.’ You too can call me that”" (80).

Parsipur reveals here her intent behind the naming of things – that what a thing is named is not as important as what it is called, while also subtly enhancing the divine sensibility of the Kind Gardener. Farrokhlaqa agrees to hire him and living up to his name he implores her to also take on Zarrinkolah, as she will learn how to be of use.

Farrokhlaqa then orders Ostovary and Mosayeb to go to town and buy building materials. At first Ostovary objects, saying that it is well after six in the evening and everything is closed. However, Farrokhlaqa tells him that the two of them have an understanding, referring to Mahdokht, and that he ought to do whatever is in his power to get people to open up and allow him to procure some materials this evening.

Shortly after the men leave there is another knock on the front door. As soon as the door opens, Fa'iza, one of the two women standing there draped in black chadors, bursts into tears. Farrokhlaqa asks what they want and the other woman, Munis, explains that they have traveled from Tehran and need a place to stay. If they are allowed to spend the night, she will tell Farrokhlaqa all about their travails. Farrokhlaqa is intrigued and permits them into her home. Once they are inside and settled a bit, Munis begins to tell the other women about her insights and experiences:

“Let me tell you that I had gotten it into my head to travel to India and the Orient in order to learn things for myself and not be told by others what to believe and what not to believe. I did not want to waste my life ignorant of transcendental truth. Of course, they say, ignorance is bliss, but I had decided to walk the path of enlightenment even if it meant suffering hardships. Naturally, when you embark on a journey you run risks. You either have the substance to overcome hardships or not. If you don’t, you return to the flock like a poor little lamb. Even so, because you have taken the risk of stepping out, others think of you as mangy. You’re avoided, ostracized. Again, you can either tolerate the situation or you can’t, and you go kill yourself.” (83)

After a brief pause to look at her audience, Munis then explains that she and Fa’iza left Tehran for Karaj and were raped along the way. She then returns to her philosophical explication of life’s secret ways:

“Of course in all of this I see a mystery. I feel there was a force that wanted to confront me with a sample of the troubles I was to face in my journey. My poor friend here [Fa’iza] had the bad luck to be in my company. I now think with this bitter experience, I have taken the first step to discover a new jurisdiction, a new set of laws. As we were walking along I was thinking about how many people had to drown so that the first human could learn to swim. Even so, there are still those who drown. In any case, these thoughts are no consolation for my poor friend here.” (84)

This is the singular exegesis on the hermeneutic nature of being that Parsipur offers in the entire narrative. Through Munis who has straddled both life and death, clearly the character most obviously representative of the binaries she opposes in the novella, Parsipur extols the challenge of being. Yet her explanation is nuanced and in many ways mired in vagaries that allow it to speak to the breadth of conflicts all of the characters have endured. And although there seems to be a dark hope embedded in the courage she describes in the first half for taking the world on rather than being a lamb, ultimately she suggests that despite all the wisdom and knowledge of the human species, people will still continue to die trudging the same path as innumerable others before them.

Fa'iza seems to miss the point of all this and complains that she was still a virgin before her rape. Munis suggests that her concern about this is unwarranted and there is nothing inherently special about being a virgin, only to have Fa'iza snap at her, ““Virginity is of no use to you anymore. I am only twenty-eight and still have a chance for a husband” (84). Farrokhlaqa is taken aback by Fa'iza's impudent attack of her friend, but before she can make a comment, Munis says, ““No, Madam Farrokhlaqa, she is not rude. She knows I read minds. It is that simple. I know what goes on in her mind. So she's learned to be frank with me.”” (84) This explanation only angers Fa'iza more as she wonders why if Munis is endowed with powers like shape shifting and mind reading, she not defend or exact revenge on their assailants. Munis continues, informing Farrokhlaqa about the fates of their rapists and explaining that she envisioned all of this. Farrokhlaqa is amused by their interaction and curious about Munis's abilities, asking:

“Can you really read minds?”

“Yes, Ma'am. For instance, Your Ladyship, you want to become a member of parliament. That poor girl over there was a prostitute until yesterday. I just know these things.”

“Do you want to stay here?” Farrokhlaqa asked with anticipation.

“Of course. Unfortunately it is still not a time for a woman to travel by herself. She must either become invisible, or stay cooped up in a house. My problem is that I can longer remain housebound, but I have to, because I am a woman. Perhaps I can make a little progress at a time. But then I will have to be stuck in a house for a while. Maybe this is the only way I can see the world, at a snail's pace. That is why I gratefully accept your invitation.” (85-86)

Thrilled at the acceptance of her invitation, Farrokhlaqa begins to materialize a marvelous community in her villa of all women (and one man, the Kind Gardener). Munis had predicted all of this and is not surprised. Fa'iza is still upset about the loss of her virginity and the desecration of her reputation, but Munis says that she need not worry. If the day comes that she marries, Munis will do some sort of magic that will keep the loss of Fa'iza's virginity a secret. Again

Fa'iza wonders why then if she has such powers, why did she not do something earlier against the rapists. Munis says, ““My dear, I have died and come back to life twice. I see things in a different way. God knows I would fly if I had wings. But my spirit is still earthbound. Believe me, virginity will be of no consequence. Should you find a husband, I'll arrange it so that you will live in conjugal bliss ever after.”” (86). Fa'iza finally calms down, and the women begin to share the stories of their lives with one another.

Chapter 10 – Farrokhlaqa's Garden (Part 2)

By spring, the Kind Gardener has brought the garden back to life and it teems with flowers. The green thumb he bragged about turns out to be a truism. “All he did was touch a bush and it blossomed into a hundred flowers the following week” (87). The women work together to renovate the house. Farrokhlaqa gives general orders, the Kind Gardener delegates actual duties, Zarrinkolah prepares the mortar, Munis delivers it to the building, and Fa'iza moves the bricks in a wheelbarrow. By the end of autumn they add two bathrooms and a pair of showers, so the house has six rooms, three showers, and three bathrooms.

Once the work is complete, Farrokhlaqa assigns rooms and chores to all of the women. Munis manages the household affairs and shares a room with Fa'iza who oversees the cooking. The gardener builds himself a small lodge at the rear of the property near the river facing Mahdokht, who still has yet to sprout any shoots or leaves.

The barrenness had caused Farrokhlaqa some concern, but the gardener had assured her that it would be full of blossoms by the spring. He had also suggested that the human-tree is not like other trees, it needs human breast milk to achieve maturity and growth. Farrokhlaqa was stumped by the suggestion, not being able to think of a source for human breast milk. (88)

However, the resourceful Kind Gardener explains that he plans to marry and impregnate Zarrinkolah who will then supply the necessary milk. Zarrinkolah, ever by his side, hums and joyfully helps him with all of his work. Fa'iza, though, from the starts holds a deep contempt for Zarrinkolah because of her past indiscretions and also finds her constant joviality annoying. Fa'iza's bitterness has yet to be quelled and is roused by the slightest provocation. She still harbors a longing to be Amir Khan's wife, "not so much out of love for him, but a desire for vindication. To have him as a husband would vindicate her womanhood" (89). For her part, Farrokhlaqa presses ahead with her machinations to become a member of parliament, impatiently trying to hurry the process of renovating the house so as to begin holding fancy fetes full of artists, tastemakers, and important cultural figures that might help to elevate her social ranking. Munis suggests that if she were to publish a poem it would be good for her advancement, and so Farrokhlaqa begins to devote a great deal of her time trying to study poetry.

With the onset of winter, the house is ready for the parties. Every Friday Farrokhlaqa opens her house to prominent figures for whom she stocks a cellar full of vintage wines, slaughters a lamb, and prepares elaborate meals. Soon the word spreads and the house regularly fills with more and more people. Although she aches to share her human-tree with the guests, the Kind Gardener tells her not to say anything until later in the year when she blooms.

Zarrinkolah cloisters herself in the lodge she shares with the Kind Gardener. When Munis inquires about her, the Kind Gardener says, "that every dawn both of them looked for dewdrops on vegetation to irrigate the tree. Since Zarrinkolah did not have a baby yet, she could not provide breast milk" (90-91). Munis wants to know more, but of all the people she has encountered since coming back to life with psychic abilities, only the Kind Gardner's mind is blocked from her. So she asks to join them on their dawn expeditions. Although the narrative is

full of magical figures, in some ways the Kind Gardener is the most exceptional; in fact, he is literally exceptional. As the sole man in this community of all women, he occupies an exceptional space that bypasses the rules that apply to everybody else. Zarrinkolah sees his head yet Munis cannot see inside of it; he has no name but nobody doubts what he ought to be called; he brings life to the garden and understands the enigmatic figure of Mahdokht with exacting insight. The Kind Gardener is the glue that forms the women from a disparate collection into a greater unified whole. Returning to the Sufi implications in the text, as the Kind Gardner's character unfolds and the women's journeys intersect and unravel, his Godlike disposition so removes him from the physical domain of the women that they really are, even with him there at every turn, truly without men.

By early April, blossoms cover the tree and Farrokhlaqa is eager to show it off to her visitors; however, the gardener still forbids it. "In fact Farrokhlaqa herself was discouraged from visiting the tree. She resented the restriction, although she kept it to herself, afraid of alienating the gardener whom she desperately needed" (91). In a story of women without men, it is curious how the Kind Gardener is the singular indispensable person in the villa. Farrokhlaqa decides to focus on her poetry and dismiss her indignation over the Kind Gardener's restrictions. Munis encourages her at times; however, Fa'iza remains dour about Farrokhlaqa's literary prospects. She feels that Munis was mistaken for encouraging Farrokhlaqa's poetry and although she has acquired these new powers, her round face proves that she will never be able to escape her simpleton mental faculties.

One Friday, a massive group of people shows up and makes it the largest party at the villa. Farrokhlaqa rushes about trying to prepare, putting Munis and Fa'iza to work. She looks around for Zarrinkolah, but only finds the Kind Gardener who tells her that Zarrinkolah will no

longer be able to help around the villa since she became pregnant the previous evening. He says she will not be able to move at all for the next nine months. Farrokhlaqa grows a bit enraged at this, but the Kind Gardener calms her by saying that he would have Mahdokht sing for the guests, which will delight them beyond compare, making the party will be the most successful one yet. But he also tells Farrokhlaqa to not have any more parties until she actually writes some poetry, otherwise these parties will be in vain since she will not be making any significant social advances.

As soon as the gardener left, singing could be heard in the garden. The guests fell silent, transfixed where they were. It was as if they were all encased in a drop of water the size of an ocean. Slowly seeping through the layers of the earth, the drops joined a myriad of elements at the earth's inner core in a dance, a perpetual, harmonic movement with no beginning or end. It was simultaneously slow and rapid. The guests' arms lifted and began to swing overhead, hanging like ropes from the sky, moving so quickly they appeared as a shadow. (93)

At dusk, the tree stops singing and the guests leave the villa in an enchanted daze. Holding to the Kind Gardener's suggestion, Farrokhlaqa stops inviting guests. She writes poetry day and night. Munis stays with the Kind Gardener and Zarrinkolah most of the time, helping him gather dew every morning. "As her pregnancy advanced and the contour of her body changed, Zarrinkolah became increasingly translucent, like crystal, with light shining through her. Munis would sometimes look at the river through her as she sat by the window watching the currents" (94). All the while, Fa'iza is left mostly by herself. With no guests coming over to cook for, Farrokhlaqa devoted to her poetry, Munis practically living with the Kind Gardener and Zarrinkolah, Fa'iza begins making routine excursions to Tehran. When there, she conjures all sorts of excuses to pass by Amir Khan's, occasionally chancing upon him.

In late summer, Farrokhlaqa finally writes a poem that she feels confident is good enough to share. She asks Munis to examine her work and offer her honest critique. The poem is flawed

in a variety ways and even though Munis does her best to find qualities without too overtly expressing her confusion at metaphors and a general lack of understanding of the poem, it is clear that she realizes that Farrokhlaqa will never be even a mediocre poet. She tries to console her nonetheless, saying:

“Don’t fret too much about poetry. There are other means of success. I’m thinking of the painter who visited here last time. I can see that he is dying to paint a portrait of you. Let him do it and then pay him generously. The word will get around and catch the attention of the movers and shakers. You are already connected with some of them. Just approach them sincerely and tell them you want to be in the parliament. They’ll help you.” (97)

Acutely reminiscent of the Oscar Wilde aphorism, “One should either be a work of art or wear a work of art” – or more aptly in this case, Munis suggests that Farrokhlaqa, lacking the talent to create works of art, should patronize some one who might be able to do so (1206). Farrokhlaqa seems relieved at Munis’s plan and agrees to start throwing parties again the following week.

With the resurgence of the parties, Amir Khan begins to visit the villa. Avoiding his sister who he now fears and never dares to boss around anymore, he spends all of his time at the villa doting on Fa’iza. She learns that he wants her to introduce him to some of the influential people who come to the parties that she has now become friendly with, but having outgrown her puerile infatuation with him, she strategically leverages her connections.

Farrokhlaqa begins modeling for the young painter, who comes to the house a couple times a week. She pays him an exorbitant sum for which he creates various sketches and myriad paintings.

Munis spends most of her days with the Kind Gardener and Zarrinkolah. Farrokhlaqa’s driver and his helper handle the bulk of duties around the house, and she becomes less and less interested in having the women there at all. She soon realizes that she wants to move back to Tehran and to keep the villa as a summer residence.

One evening in mid-January, the garden fills with a mysterious light that awakens Munis who immediately knows that Zarrinkolah is giving birth. She heads for the lodge through a blanket of snow that has fallen through the night. Zarrinkolah, now completely transparent, has become one with the light.

The Kind Gardener appears unconcerned with his wife's condition and sits in the corner mending his shoes. Munis panics and says they ought to help her; however, he says that the woman is fine and that "a true woman gives birth by herself" (99). Just before dawn Zarrinkolah gives birth to a morning glory. The gardener carries the flower in his cupped hands to the riverbank where he had already dug a hole in the sand, now filled with snow. He gently places the seedling on the ice. Munis warns that it will freeze. The Kind Gardener replies that it will not freeze, but will grow roots and flourish. When they return to the lodge, Zarrinkolah is herself again, though her breasts are now swollen with milk. The Kind Gardener caresses his wife and massages her feet. He then expresses some of the milk from her breasts into a cup, and together with Munis they go to feed Mahdokht.

After they return to the lodge, Munis continues back to the house in the early dawn light. She rests on a tree and tells herself that she needs help, suddenly discovering the severity of her loneliness and aimlessness. Parsipur writes:

In a way, she envied the prostitute. The prostitute had won too easily, having achieved the sanctity of light, as spontaneously and effortlessly as laughing. Munis could not penetrate this mystery.

"How can I turn into light?"

There was no answer.

She lacked the potential to become a tree, it wasn't in her nature. She was not fertile either. She knew that she was rotting from within. She knew that what led to the clarity of light was love, something she had never experienced in her life. She had progressed to the edge of wonderment, but love was oceans away. She knew that love would come if she could sincerely feel the essence of a tree past the roughness of its bark. But always, the physical sensation of the roughness

interrupted her. She always knew the malice of humankind, without herself being in its possession. She had not learned to be malicious. She only knew malice.

In a deserted stretch of the Karaj Highway Munis had come face-to-face with unbridled lust, although she knew what lust was before being touched by it. The problem was that she had an unbounded awareness of things, an awareness that instilled undue caution in her, making her fearful that action would lead to ignominy, humiliation. This created in her a desire to be ordinary, average. Yet she did not truly know what it meant to be ordinary. She did not know that it meant not loving an earthworm, not genuflecting at the altar of withered leaves, not standing in prayer at the call of a lark, not climbing a mountain to see the sunrise, not staying awake all night to gaze at the Ursa Major. She did not differentiate between earth and gravel, but she distinguished the earth from the sky. She had not seen the skies of the earth, but she knew there were earths of the sky. She saw herself in an inevitable process of stagnation. She was already partially rotten within.

“What can I do with this mass of trivial knowledge? How can I cut through it?”(100-102)

This long passage quoted in its entirety is the final philosophical musing of the text and completes Munis’s existential analysis. She reflects on the breadth of the heavens and the earth, life and death and life again, yet only returns to a sense that it is “trivial” and wishes for some way to pierce it.

At the door of the house she sees Farrokhlaqa who is upset that Munis had left the door open and allowed the cold night to seep in. Munis tries to seek counsel from Farrokhlaqa, but the older woman has grown tired of Munis’s confusion and angst. She is no longer intimidated by her mind-reading abilities and actually believes that Munis is too simple to thoroughly take advantage of her powers, only allowing herself to be tormented by her insights.

Farrokhlaqa dismisses Munis’s existential crisis by telling her that she is leaving for Tehran that day into a house she has rented and will not be back until summer. The women can stay for as long as they want, but they must be gone when she returns and should give their keys to the gardener when they leave. The chapter ends and the dream is over.

Chapter 11 – Mahdokht

Parsipur completes the stories of her characters by returning to them individually one more time in the same order that opens the book. They all start separately, come together, but then are torn apart again at the end. In some critical ways this is not only a story of women without men, but as well, one of women without anybody else. The deep loneliness that strikes through each of the characters is scarcely quelled even at the height of their communing. They are always working toward something that seems just within reach yet never achieved. As their journeys seem to reach a point of discovery, they are undercut by the reality of what they want not being as they imagined it would be.

The return to Mahdokht offers an approximate timeline of events in the entire narrative as it details her development from person to tree over about the course of approximately three years:

Mahdokht had planted herself on the riverbank in the fall [...] She shivered incessantly until the winter frost froze her all over [...] With the first spring showers, a thaw set in and splintered the ice and she felt the tingling of sprouting buds on her limbs [...] The fall arrived again, and with it came the cold [...] The winter she was fed with dewdrops [...] in the spring she was once more covered with sprouting buds [...] when the summer arrived, she saw the water turn blue and schools of fish in it. Freezing weather returned in early autumn and the sky darkened [...] By midwinter she was being fed with human breast milk [...] she was fed human milk for three months. Toward the end of April the pressure within her had reached explosive force. It burst out suddenly and violently. (103-105)

With this blowout, in an event that resembles giving birth, Mahdokht detaches from herself. In an instant everything ends. Her life as tree explodes into a mountain of seeds picked up by the wind that hurls them into a river, and she is thus spread all of over the world.

Mahdokht is the fulfillment of the ultimate feat sought by the women's immersion in the garden. She embeds herself in earth; then time and compassion result in her becoming one with

nature. Her timeline shows how she needed the intervention by all of the people at the villa (except for Fa'iza) for her becoming. Farrokhlaha had to buy the property and invite all of the others. The Kind Gardener, Zarrinkolah, and Munis fed her the dew, and finally she feasted on Zarrinkolah's breast milk.

It is striking that Fa'iza has no interaction whatsoever with Mahdokht, perhaps because they represent two poles in their relationship to nature. Mahdokht utterly ethereal, eventually atomizes in the wind, whereas Fa'iza entirely bound to the material realm, is thoroughly committed to the impressions of other people and society to define her identity and reputation. Her overwhelming concern about virginity has almost nothing to do with any sort of theological devotion but rather her designs about the sort of life she wants to live and her place in society. Mahdokht shuns society and seeks whatever means she can conceive to leave the human order. The absence of Fa'iza from Mahdokht's narrative and Mahdokht from Fa'iza's is a keen portrait of these opposing forces at play in Parsipur's narrative that unfolds through negation rather than indication.

Chapter 12 – Fa'iza

Although occupying a wholly different existential plane as Mahdokht, Fa'iza's story also ends with her getting exactly what she wants. The chapter begins with the details of her days travelling to Tehran while still living at the villa and "accidentally" running into Amir Khan. The two soon begin to meet quite intentionally and go on long walks in the middle of the day. Apparently they meet so often and for so long that he is reprimanded at work and they must change the time of their meetings to early evening. He eventually tells her that he does not like the idea of her traveling from Tehran and Karaj by herself routinely. She asks what he wants her

to do. He suggests she move back into her grandmother's place in Tehran, which she quickly rejects. Then he says that he will rent her a room, implying that she can be his girl on the side. She is offended by the notion. He then says that they ought to enter into a temporary marriage (*sigeh*), which are essentially religiously sanctioned means for people to have sex. Iranian brothels commonly retain an in-house Mullah who will marry men to prostitutes for an hour and in that ridiculous way concede to some sort of religious orthodoxy. Fa'iza does not like the idea, but acquiesces. However, when they go to the notary to have this done, he says that he only does permanent marriages. So they get permanently married and spend the night together in a hotel.

The next morning Amir Khan wakes up in a sour mood and searches the room. Shuffling things everywhere, ruffling the sheets, he seeks some evidence that he has taken her virginity. Fa'iza stares silently out of the window as Amir Khan finds nothing. He gives up and realizes he has been duped a second time. She tells him that they need to find her a small house. He asks why she cannot come live in his house, but she refuses to share a roof with his other wife. Soon they find another house for her. He gets a better a job. And although their life is not ideal, it is not too bad either.

Chapter 13 – Munis

This chapter opens with the final moments of Mahdokht's life before becoming a mountain of seeds that are scattered by the wind. After the seeds spread, the Kind Gardener tells Munis that the time has come for her to become a human. She longs to become pure light and asks how she could achieve this end instead. He tells her:

“The day you conceive the essence of darkness. That is what you have to comprehend. That is the principle. Don't seek to become light; that is a journey of no return. Look at our mutual friend, she wanted to become a tree and she achieved her aim. She thought it would be difficult, but it was not. Sadly, she did

not achieve humanity. Now as seed, she will have to restart the journey toward humanity, a journey that will take eons.

“Now I tell you to go in search of darkness anew. Descend to the depths, to the depth of depths. There you will see the light aglow in your hands, by your side. That is being human. Now, go become human.” (109-110)

Instantly she turns into a whirlwind and rises to the sky. Then she is in a desert. “Seven years passed and she passed through seven deserts, fatigued and aged, devoid of hope and vision, but replete with experience. That was all. She arrived in the city after seven years. She bathed, put on fresh cloths, and became a simple schoolteacher” (110).

As the philosophical core in a narrative of complex figures, Munis divulges the sharpest introspection but in the most complicated ways. Guided through her journey by the Kind Gardner, unlike Mahdokht and Fa’iza who are both thoroughly entrenched in either the ethereal or material worlds, Munis is a spirit that straddles both. She resists the binaries rife throughout the text, instead offering commentary and interpretation; albeit ever enigmatic, it is the most the reader will get.

Chapter 14 – Farrokhlaqa Sadroddin Golchehreh

Farrokhlaqa leaves the villa for the house she rented in Tehran and spends the winter there with the young painter. He paints innumerable portraits of her, and they host a gallery show. Although the first night the place is crowded with all of the important figures in town, attendance dwindles severely over the following days and the painter is crushed. He is morbidly depressed and soon begins to annoy Farrokhlaqa, who then sends him to Paris to train with the masters. Alone again, she is bored and restless, until meeting a new man who instantly notes her far-reaching prospects.

Mr. Merrikhi paid her a visit one day. He was an old friend of Fakhroddin Azod and privy to her affair with him. He was very respectful, reverential in fact,

toward her. He believed she had remarkable potential for social advancement, except that it had not been channeled in the right direction. He proposed marriage to open new venues for her to achieve her goals. She consented. (112)

He goes on to become a member of parliament while she takes up charitable works. They both receive public honors and become important social figures. “They have a fairly good relationship, not torrid by any means, but not frigid either” (112).

Her life is neither material nor ethereal, rather she is a critic of both. Only excessive in ambition, Farrokhlaqa is constantly foiled by the men whom she allows into her midst. Nevertheless, she is the vital element that brings all of the characters together and allows for their community to form.

Chapter 15 – Zarrinkolah

The final chapter in the book is also the shortest, Parsipur writes:

Zarrinkolah married the Kind Gardener and became pregnant. In time, she gave birth to a morning glory. She loved it as her own child. The morning glory flourished on the bank of the river.

“Zarrinkolah,” her husband called her, “we must go on a journey.”

Zarrinkolah cleaned the house and packed a bundle of clothing for the journey.

“But we don’t need clothes where we’re going. Leave your bundle behind.” She obeyed and took her husband by the hand.

They embraced the morning glory. The morning glory wrapped its foliage around them and they all rose to the sky in a puff of smoke. (113)

This brief conclusion to an inscrutable text achieves perhaps the best thing a final chapter can: leading the reader to back to the beginning of the book in an attempt to unpack its allegories and explore the murky depths of the narrative. Parsipur leaves the reader with more questions than answers. She crafted a short and powerful book that not only can easily be read repeatedly, but needs to be.

Politics and Metaphor

Parsipur's work remains contemplative throughout. It reflects upon the world that it is presenting without appearing to step outside of the narrative. She balances absurdity and horrific circumstances, as in the case of when everybody keeps fainting around the murdered Munis, to draw attention to not just the tragedy in the narrative, but to the general social acceptance of the whole situation.

The story's timeless quality further enlarges the effect of her work. That these events could occur just as readily in 1953, 1978, 1988, 1998, 2009, 2011, speaks to the unfortunate persistence of hardships the women of her story endure.¹⁸

Much of the narrative unfolds through an exploration of absence and loss of material objects as well as immaterial essences. Each character longs for something, and although most largely acquire it, unfortunately the acquisitions all happens a bit after their prime. It is as if, by the time they get the freedom, husband, social disposition, or identity they sought, the luster has faded and it is now just another of life's artifacts. The magic of longing in the garden evaporates as soon as they leave it. The journey they experienced to the garden, then within it, weighs down their departure back into their individual lives. Understanding and wisdom is a precious load to bear.

Prior to the garden, most of the characters existed by imitation rather than intention, posing as different social roles to make up for an absent authentic self. This was a strong theme amongst the increasingly Islamic politico writers in Iran during the 1960's and 1970's. Figures

¹⁸ These dates represent the keys points of the narrative's setting, invention, and circulation, respectively: narrative's initial setting (1953), author completes writing (1978), first publication in Persian (1988), first translation into any language by Talattof/Sharlet (English) (1998), release of Neshat's film adaptation (2009), and the second translation into English by Farrokh (2011).

like Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shari'ati would condemn the monarchy for corrupting the souls of Iranians by luring them to feast on consumerist and vacuous Western ideals.

In 1962, Jalal Al-e Ahmad's book *Gharbzadegi* appeared and was instantly embraced as an insightful diagnosis of Western influence on Iran and a prophetic text that predicted the radical changes imminent in the following decades. Translated as Weststruckness, Westoxication, Euromania, or a number of other things, *Gharbzadegi* had a clandestine circulation until 1978 due to censorship by the Iranian Secret police (SAVAK); it nevertheless had a stark effect on the nation's revolutionary thinkers, not the least of whom was Ruhollah Khomeini.¹⁹

Throughout his text Al-e Ahmad employs a trope of sickness and malady striking the people of Iran. The fundamental indisposition of this metaphor is the victimized disposition of Iranian people. Al-e Ahmad proposes the condition of sickness as something contracted from imperialistic infestation; therefore, an Islam driven recuperation of self could be the only remedy.

Al-e Ahmad laments the Eastern compulsion to imitate the West. He writes, "We're like a nation alienated from itself, in our clothing and our homes, our food and our literature, our publications, and most dangerously of all, our education. We affect Western training, we affect Western thinking, and we follow Western procedures to solve every problem" (59). The malady of *gharbzadegi* is described throughout the text as taking on the form of tumors, cancer, cholera, and even sterilization. However, in every case the Iranian suffers these symptoms by his or her own negated will, if it can be called will. Their agency reduced to a near-annihilated state, they

¹⁹ For more about this theo/political lineage see Hamid Dabashi's *Theology of Discontent* (2006).

submit as a circumstance of trauma, for they know nothing else because everything else has been stripped away, or worse, sold off.

The appropriation of Iranian identity and recuperation from this Weststruck state is inspired to its zenith by the logical progeny of Al-e Ahmad's thinking in the work of Ali Shari'ati during the 1970s. "Al-e Ahmad found cultural roots and ties to the Iranian people in Islam. This feeling is found in a new way in Ali Shari'ati. After Al-e Ahmad died, Shari'ati took up the part of his work that was devoted to giving an Islamic response to the modern world" (Keddie 189). Shari'ati poignantly specifies a response that Al-e Ahmad only alluded to, one wherein self-imposed Gharbzadegi is remedied with deposition of the traumatized self by an Islamized self.

Throughout Shari'ati's texts we find deliberate echoes of Al-e Ahmad's criticisms, in particular the vacuous individual who has lost connection to his faith and identity:

Colonial powers, particularly at their early stages, under the guise of "attacking fanaticism" fought religion, under the name of "condemning reactionism" attacked history, and using the pretext of "hacking away at superstition and old beliefs," assaulted tradition in order to produce a people without history, without tradition, without culture, without religion, and without any form of identity. In the face of colonialism, people have become monkey-like. They take pride in practicing "extreme modernism in the form of new consumerism," and deny their own cultural tradition by displaying "exuberant imitation" and "assimilation." As a result, they will enthusiastically submit to the fate that others have determined for them. (Shari'ati "What Is To Be Done" 31)

However, he delivers his ultimate scrutiny of Iranians by acknowledging a truth about them that Al-e Ahmad never suggested: the self-imposition of this insufferable state. "Islam has been distorted from within. It has lost its truth and vitality and has sacrificed with its own sword the purest and sincerest of its supporters and leaders" (Shari'ati "What Is To Be Done" 35). In deriding the most sacred aspect of Iranian society, its religion, Shari'ati presents us with the

simple fact that if this foundational element that defines the nature of being Iranian is prone to perversion, then all that is born from this fruit is all the more tainted.

Adopting Al-e Ahmad's call for a return to self, Shari'ati directly connects this return to Islam. The dynamic call to arms that Shari'ati proposes embeds Islam as both the profaned root and the purifying remedy for his static society.

Islam is what we must return to, not only because it is the religion of our society, the shaper of our history, the spirit of our culture, the powerful conscience and the strong binder of our people, and the foundation of our morality and spirituality, but also because it is the human "self" of our people. ... In fighting the culture-removing techniques of colonizers, we must arm ourselves with Islam because of what it is to us. (Shari'ati "What Is To Be Done" 53)

In examining his thesis with the benefit of hindsight, we readily discern the implications that his imperatives must have inspired in the youths who would engage in the Islamic Revolution.

"What is needed is an intellectual revolution and an Islamic renaissance, a cultural and ideological movement based on the deepest foundations of our beliefs, equipped with the richest resources that we possess" (49). Unfortunately, this cosmopolitan spiritual leader took form in Khomeini who interpreted "Islamic renaissance" decidedly more tyrannically. Keddie credits Shari'ati with anticipating the Islamic Revolution and signaling to the youth of the nation that change was necessary and looming. "Ali Shariati did the most to prepare Iranian youth for revolutionary upheaval. Events made this Muslim sociologist, shortly after his 1977 death, the ideologist of the revolt. In opposition demonstrations, his portrait was carried beside that of Ayatollah Khomeini" (200). Khomeini owed much to Shari'ati, for he endowed the Islamic Revolution with intellectual credibility, without which its grandiloquence could have been readily dismissed.²⁰ Together, these thinkers were dominating the political discourse in Iran as

²⁰ It is not necessary to too closely examine Khomeini's direct influence on Shari'ati's work, for although he was an important figure in Iran during the 1970's, it was from afar, as he was exiled to Iraq and then Paris from 1964

Parsipur was writing her book. To ignore their overt influence in interpreting her female characters' experiences would be a tremendous oversight, especially because throughout these men's works, they almost never address women. All of the agency in society belongs to men, and when they falter, they are, in fact, emasculated and compared to women.

In light of this bifurcated perception of self prevailing in the contemporary social critique of 1970's Iran, many of the metaphors in Parsipur's book take on much more complex resonance. The foreign is treated throughout as superlative in the view of the women throughout the first half of the book. It is not until after they leave the garden, with a deeper understanding of themselves, that they seem less inclined to look so far away for fulfillment. Even Munis, after exploring the entire world, ultimately returns to Iran to be a "humble" schoolteacher.

The streets of Tehran were thick with angry chanting crowds during the years Parsipur was writing this book. They were chanting quotes drawn from the works of Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati, as Dabashi reminisces: "*Westoxication*²¹ was read and discussed in high schools and universities as the first bibliographical item on a hidden syllabus with which the Iranian youth of the 1960s came to political self-consciousness. You were accepted into cliques of political activists by virtue of your ability to quote passages from the text verbatim" (*Theology* 76). Three decades later, however, Dabashi bemoans the thwarted hopes of Iranians before and after the Islamic Revolution. Admitting how misdirected they were, he writes, "We were not careful what we were wishing for, for it came true" (*Iran: A People Interrupted* 136). Parsipur may have seen the writing on the wall as well. Although her contemporary thinkers in Iran were paving the road from Al-e Ahmad to Shari'ati to Khomeini, she suggests a different journey.

until the Revolution in 1979. It was not until after the 1977 death of Shari'ati that Khomeini became the leading opposing voice to the Pahlavi monarchy.

²¹ *Gharbzadegi* has been translated numerous times and thus been supplied with various titles in translation including: *Westoxication*, *Occidentosis*, *Weststruckness*, *Euromania*, and *Westernitis*.

Her women escape from the chaos in the streets of Tehran via an inward journey that demands no predetermined ablution rites, or myths about virginity, or condemnation. Parsipur sees the world that is coming in the years immediately following the completion of this novel and whether she realized it or not, was putting together a prescription for an alternate journey toward a similar destination. Unfortunately it would not reach the streets of Iran until nearly a decade into Islamic Republic's takeover. Although, that may be exactly why it continues to resonate, as it proposes a different image of the journey for understanding, freedom, identity, and happiness than what we usually see coming from Iran.

CHAPTER 2 – *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN*, PUBLICALLY TRANSLATED

Women without Men was first translated into English by Kamran Talattof and Jocelyn Sharlet in 1998 for the Syracuse University Press. In 2004, the title was acquired by First Feminist Press, which continued to use the Talattof and Sharlet translation for their critical edition. A new edition was released in 2011, still published by the First Feminist Press, but with an entirely new translation by Faridoun Farrokh. Although the reason behind the second translation and the translators' actual intentions and motivations will be discussed at length in the next chapter, here the translations will be studied as discreet works of translation.

Parsipur's novella stands at a critical juncture in both her life and the burgeoning of her engagement with the world beyond Iran. It was the first of her works to be translated into any other language as a standalone text, thus introducing her to the non-Persian reading world as a figure not lumped into a broad anthology.²² Not only has it had the unusual history of being translated twice within a relatively short span of thirteen years, but there has also been a film adaption by the famed Iranian visual artist Shirin Neshat in 2009, who also penned the foreword to the most recent translation. The effect the original work produced in Iran was profound enough to have the author jailed twice, and then establish her renown around the world as offering a voice to Iran's marginalized female population.

In whatever form or medium, time or place, translation is at its root a rhetorical act that reconstructs a message for movement from one audience to a different one driven by some purpose. Whether this reconstruction is inter-lingual (transferring codes for one linguistic community to those of another, from English to Persian for example) or inter-medial (shifting from one medium to another, such as film adaptations of novels) – in every act of translation

²²Her first translated work into English was part of the Moayyad Heshmat edited *Stories from Iran: A Chicago Anthology* (1991), in which Paul Sprachman translated "Trial Offers," a short story by Parsipur.

something is always gained, the minimal gain being the opportunity for a new audience to experience some message deemed valuable enough to be translated into this alternate language or medium. There is no limit to the benefits discoverable when learning from those who are so different from us that we do not even understand their language.

Throughout this chapter, I unpack the theories of translation operating in the two English translations of *Women without Men*. By deriving how they function and perhaps which methods are at play toward specific ends, we can consider how to teach translation production in a more strategic way as well as more broadly across disciplines.

Originary Interpretations

All of the stories that came together as *Women without Men* were written before the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and largely draw from distinct experiences in Parsipur's life to tell a story that is as politically charged as it is culturally divulgent. She explains:

Hemingway has a book, *Men without Women*, and in this book he doesn't mean that the men don't have any women. But he wants to show that some men can't understand women. I thought that there are women who can't understand men. The reason I tried to publish this book was because the Islamic Republic was very cruel to the women. And they wanted to limit the woman. They wanted the woman to go back in to her home. So I tried to show women that are not objects. They are not just their virginity. They are human beings. (*WwM* Symposium, panel 3)²³

Despite her focus on women in her narrative, she dismisses people who suggest she is a feminist. She says, "I am not a feminist. I think always about the men and the women. I can't separate them. I can't touch just one of them" (*WwM* Symposium, panel 3). Her book intends to show that

²³ Please note that passages cited as such, e.g. (*WwM* Symposium, panel ...), are my transcriptions from the *Women without Men* Symposium at UC Irvine, February 14th, 2014.

the whole of a society needs to be heard as complete beings, otherwise there can be no understanding.

Her allegorical intentions were foundational, as she originally intended to write twelve characters, each one representing a different astrological sign.²⁴ Ultimately she gave up this broader figurative effort as it was not bearing the sort of fruit she desired, and she instead focused on her own life to develop the narrative. She gives a detailed explanation of this in the “Author’s Note” found in Farrokh’s translation: “I knitted the personalities of my mother and my cousin together to help me create the personality of Mrs. Farrokhлага Sadroddin Golchehreh. [...] Many of the other characters in this book were inspired by people I knew” (119).²⁵ Zarrinkolah was formed around the smile of a woman she saw once on the streets of Tehran as a child and she would later meet again in prison. Parsipur writes:

I was inspired by that woman’s presence and that smile when I was creating Zarrinkolah’s character. One day many years later, while I was imprisoned by the leaders of the Islamic Republic, jailed for writing this very book, I walked with a prostitute in the prison’s courtyard. She was old and tired, arrested because she was an addict. [...] That day in the courtyard, she told me she was forced into prostitution at the age of ten. Then, as she was walking away from me, she turned back toward me, smiling, and suddenly I knew it was the same woman I had met as a child. So, my prostitute was now old, an addict, and very lonely. (120).

Munis was a combination of herself and parts of an aunt of her who became a dervish. Mahdokht is based on this aunt’s daughter with a “beautiful and clear voice but being a god-fearing person, she did not sing. She suffered from anorexia during the latter years of her life and when lowered into her grave, she weighed less than sixty pounds” (121). Fa’iza is loosely drawn from another

²⁴ Parsipur has studied astrology extensively and translated works about Chinese astrology, Taoism, and Chinese history from French into Persian.

²⁵ Shahbaz Parsipour translated the Author’s Note in Farrokh’s translation. It does not appear in the Talattof/Sharlet translation.

cousin who suddenly turned bad and “truly believed that [Parsipur] was an idiot because [her] face is round” (121). That all of the women ended up in Karaj also stems from her childhood memories. She explained to me during a meeting that she had grown up poor but had a relation whose family was quite wealthy. Parsipur’s family visited this relation’s villa in Karaj when she was about fourteen years old. At that time Karaj was still more of a village than a bustling urban city. Compared to the chaos of Tehran where she grew up, Karaj was indubitably something mystical. Sleeping under the stars one night, she was overwhelmed by how the trees seemed to cradle the sky, and it was from that moment that Karaj embedded itself in her psyche as a location where wondrous things happen.

In her book she offers a benevolent legacy to the people in her own life that did not fare so well. Although the book does not end tragically, her parting words to its readers embody so much of the loss inherent to life that her story explores. In the penultimate paragraph of her “Author’s Note” she writes, “Everyone who influenced the characters I created in this novella is dead now. Generally, when I think about the people I once knew, I find that the number of dead is far greater than the living. I hope none of those I have described here will be offended in the afterlife, if such a thing exists” (122). Even here she maintains her equivocal sensibility, leaving the reader to wonder whether this final sentence is a bit of dark humor, or if she is entreating us to allow one last existential quandary.

Women without Men is formed around people and experiences from early in her life that all collapse and coalesce in a powerful narrative. That Parsipur adapted features and aspects from such a broad swathe of sources allows her work to successfully radiate as broadly as it has.

Asking Parsipur her thoughts on translation as a practice, she is quick to encourage it, but specifies that given the challenges of this work, translators should be mindful of the audience

most in need of a deeper understanding of the foreign. She says that we should not be concerned about translating much into Persian over here in America. Everything here is available in Persian in Iran; however, the circulation of knowledge seems to largely flow from West to East. “But if you wanted to do the opposite, that would be really good. The works of Iranians should be translated into English” (Parsipur interview summer 2013).

Misinterpreted Traditions

For an American reader with somewhat of a grasp of modern literature, the initial reaction to Parsipur’s work is connecting it to Hemingway’s seminal short story collection, *Men without Women*. Hemingway’s book is full of stories of despondent men who are struggling against themselves, time, and the changing world around them, in often banal and sometimes daring feats of life. Parsipur tells the occasionally interwoven story of women who are also confronting similar challenges; however, adding to the complexity of their dispositions is the gravity of an Iranian landscape in place of Hemingway’s Europe and America. The experiences of women in modern Iran are fraught with the ultimate extension of the machismo and even misogyny often cited in Hemingway’s work. Even so, this would be a mistaken literary tradition to embed Parsipur within, as she herself confesses to having drawn the bulk of her stylistic inspiration from *Arabian Nights/1001 Nights* and merely fancied Hemingway’s title. In fact, any literary similarities between her work and his are coincidental.

The early 20th century European/American Modernist literary movement had a profound effect on Iranian writers. Some of the most important works of Iran’s modern writers are rife with not just stylistic qualities reminiscent of Modernism, but in fact are intentionally embedded with a range of references from the symbolic to distinctly structural. One of the more striking

examples of this inspired international literary relationship is seen in Sadeq Chubak's *Sang-e Sabur* [The Patient Stone], a novel quite consciously written in the unique style of Faulkner's Modernist masterpiece *As I Lay Dying*. Chubak's work poignantly appropriates salient elements of Faulkner's style that he uses to drive one aspect of his narrative, only to then push beyond the tradition to express his unique take on the human condition. Chubak's English translator, M.R. Ghanoonparvar explains the parameters of his borrowing from Faulkner, as well as the new ground he navigates from that foundation:

In its use of soliloquy, *the Patient Stone* shows some similarity with William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* in that in Faulkner's novel the plot unfolds through the soliloquies of fifteen characters. In other words, each soliloquy contributes to the development of the action of the story. If one were to consider the monologues of all the characters in *The Patient Stone*, with the exception of those Ahmad Aqa, a striking technical similarity would exist between the two novels, since in *The Patient Stone*, too, the plot unfolds through the soliloquies of the characters. However, with the addition of Ahmad Aqa and his concerns that extend far beyond time and space of the external events of the novel, the similarity ends. ("On the Patient Stone" 79-80)

It is critical to not reduce this relationship down to a sort of influence study, but rather to recognize a shared phenomenological disposition that inspired artists in both of the cultures. The Iranians entered a Euro-American tradition not simply as an act of inspired mimicry, but (borrowing from Gadamer), through a fusion of horizons. The features of Modernism adroitly facilitated Iranian expression of ontological conditions similar in kind to those of Americans like Hemingway and Faulkner.

Parsipur's own work, *Women without Men*, inverts the title of Hemingway's *Men without Women*. Stylistically the two texts are largely disparate, especially given that Hemingway is writing at his most laconic and precise in this collection of short stories, and Parsipur is clearly embracing a whimsical, magical realistic technique. Despite Parsipur's narrative unfolding in a nuanced magical realistic style, the punchiness of the sentence structure is quite Hemingway.

Nevertheless, the mere invocation of Hemingway in her title invites a comparative analysis and consideration of Modernist influence that the text itself supports. And although only most, but not all, of the chapters are titled with the name of the character they are largely about, given the precedence of a Modernist influence that she herself encourages, the tradition that Chubak tapped into from Faulkner can also be recognized. Her intention really is negligible, for that is the one thing the reader will never know, even if she could articulate it.²⁶

The net result of these elements is that there is ever an American shadow spilling over the shoulders of the reader who recognizes these literary gestures. When somebody who has read Hemingway reads Parsipur's work, it seems inevitable that at times the work appears as a translation of experiences. In Parsipur's work we find not just an inverted title, but a collection of narratives expressing the lives of women Hemingway did not concern himself with exploring – women that he may not have ever even thought about, thus truly a man without these women. By telling her stories, Parsipur fills in the blanks left behind not just by Hemingway, but by the very society her characters struggle within to merely survive. Regardless of whether her interpretations and inspiration are drawn from Hemingway, to a reader of the translation in English, more likely familiar with Hemingway than Parsipur or Hedayat or Chubak, this invocation allows the text to deliver the experiences of a marginalized people into the purview of an audience that may not have been previously accessible. She appropriates the ethos of the Modernists in her title, subject, and style at times so as to allow her work consideration by people who may not have otherwise been willing to bother.

²⁶ Although I was privileged with insight gleaned from my interviews with the author, as well as her talk at the Symposium, this was a highly unusual circumstance. The author that is rarely available to the average reader of any book, and even more rarely the original author of a translated work. As such, the author's intention tends to be irrelevant given its general unavailability.

By going through Hemingway, her novella operates both as an individual cultural artifact, but also as a critique of his legacy. Regardless of how imperfectly her stories graft on top of Hemingway's, her invocation invariably results in a palimpsestic product intimately composed of both antecedent and progeny simultaneously. As much as the women in Parsipur's work escape the men in their lives, the one they can never elude is Hemingway.

Just as the title summons Hemingway and a Modernist interpretation for an American reader, this same audience will most likely be more familiar with the magical realistic styling of Gabriel Garcia Marquez than *Arabian Nights/1001 Nights*. However, Parsipur herself confesses that she had not read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* until years after writing *Women without Men*. She was intending to write something that fit squarely within an Iranian tradition, yet could speak broadly to the world through universal metaphors and motivations. In this sense, Parsipur herself is the metatextual Scheherazade of *Women without Men*. Although she stands outside of the text to tell the stories, she nevertheless frames the work. Parsipur does not see herself as a feminist, but rather a humanist. She is not trying to salvage women from the clutches of men, but instead seeks to disclose the interdependency that must be cultivated between them, as well as amongst all people.

Translator's Fidelity to Audience vs. Fidelity to Author

Even the most rudimentary translation requires an incredible amount of time and dedication, and unfortunately does not often result in particularly lucrative financial rewards.²⁷ The people who do decide to take on the challenge of translating, especially professional literary translating for the retail market, are almost always driven by a passion for the work and a belief

²⁷ One of the running jokes amongst the esteemed translators in the room during the Symposium was about this very point. Consensus set the figure at about \$1500 for translating virtually any book.

that whatever they are working on *needs* to be offered to this audience for whom they are writing. There must be something missing for the audience, and this work will fill that gap. In this fundamental way, translation seeks to teach; however, in a distinctly desperate way. Translations teach people things that were usually not intended for them to know *per se*.

For a work to be retranslated, the previous translation would have to have lacked something or presented it in a way that a subsequent translator feels misrepresents the force of the source text. Thus, we find innumerable retranslations of scripture and usually few retranslations of literary works. Even the classic texts of the Western canon from the ancient Greek philosophers to contemporary poets and authors rarely provoke retranslation by more than a handful of people with the authority to have their work published. That Parsipur's work finds itself the subject of this sort of attention by prominent Iranian literary scholars like Talattof, Sharlet, and Farrokh is at the very least intriguing. However, when we contrast the choices that these two teams pursued in their interpretations, we are then confronted by a remarkable difference in not just the texts produced, but also a manifestation of the two broadest and commonest conceptualizations of translation theory and traditions.

The history of translation has been fraught with numerous binaries that contrast the choices made by translators in the face of the texts they are translating. Anthologies of translation theory are full of such categorical distinctions, often demanding that translators commit to one side or another of inorganically constructed oppositions, such as meaning versus style, toward target or source, force or fidelity, and the like. The actual work of translation, though, is far more nuanced and tends to involve a delicate balance of these alleged antinomies rather than stalwart commitment to any particular translational agenda. Nevertheless, these concepts are helpful in making particular distinctions in the analysis of translation projects and in

the case of these two renderings of Parsipur's novella into English, the translators' aims and intentions happen to stand in rather stark opposition to one another.

In the Talatoff/Sharlet translation we are offered a more faithful text, in that it retains the tone of the original without much translator interference. The translators' choices are consistently aimed at delivering to an English reading audience as close of an approximation to the form of Parsipur's Persian source. The Farrokh translation on the other hand is far more stringent in its efforts to extend the meaning of the text to this new audience. He often editorializes with phrases to clarify idioms in the original, and sometimes even resigns himself to inserting footnotes for further clarification of concepts that might be disruptive to an audience unfamiliar with certain Iranian rites and cultural attitudes. Although a striking feature of Parsipur's Persian original is the use of magic realist tropes in bending linear time and the dissolution of the boundaries between the real and fantastical, her actual sentence structure lacks the layered and ornate characteristics commonly associated with the genre. The Talatoff/Sharlet translation pays strict attention to this authorial choice and echoes it in their rendering. However, the newer translation employs a more loquacious style of interpreting the novella. Farrokh turns away from a laconic employment of language and description, opting instead to present a more verbose and lavish rendering of the stories. Although the construction of Farrokh's sentences are more in accordance with the qualities of the genre of magic realism, much of his interpretation lacks the curt style of the original. He prefers to be exhaustive with his descriptions, often filling in the blanks for the new and foreign audience, whereas Talatoff/Sharlet directly translated Parsipur's book, often word-for-word. Both tell the same story, though in drastically different ways.

Domesticating the Foreign

A corollary to the fidelity of a translation is its tendency toward domestication in its styling and sensibility. In service of rendering a text as close in sense and meaning to the original, translators must decide where they ought to bend the language to transmit meaning and when the demands of meaning require a completely different set of metaphors, allegories, and idioms. Is the translation any less faithful if in translating a text that employs a persimmon to explain some symbol, the translator instead chose a kiwi because the intended audience had never heard of a persimmon? The balance between where a translator draws the line, deciding between what to translate literally and what to rewrite, is the practical manifestation of the translator's locus of fidelity, audience or author.

Often this binary is measured on the scale of domesticating versus foreignizing a text for the target language. To domesticize, localize, or smooth over a text is to remove from it any traces of the original language and to render a translation such that when the target audience receives it, the verbiage, grammar, and logic all appear more familiar than foreign, if foreign at all. Whereas, to foreignize a text is to translate more literally, often leaving in strange idioms in the translation, as well as references that may not make perfect sense to the new audience. We see clear examples of these contrasting techniques in the two translations of *Women without Men*. The first translation, a far more literal one, maintains the original idioms and much of the idiosyncrasies of Iranian culture without any attempt to explain or unpack them for a foreign audience. The second translation, though, supplements the narrative itself with terms, simplifications, editorializations, footnotes, and a much more polished style, so that the reading experience will not be interrupted by intercultural confusion.

Venuti explains that despite the translator's intention, the audience is inherently predisposed to absorb ideas in reference to their own lives and culture, (making the challenge of foreignizing in service of fidelity all the more precarious):

Translation never communicates in an untroubled fashion because the translator negotiates the linguistic and cultural differences of the domestic, drawn from the receiving language and culture to enable the foreign to be received there. The foreign text, then, is not so much communicated as inscribed with domestic intelligibilities and interest. The inscription begins with the very choice of a text for translation, always a very selective, densely motivated choice, and continues in the development of discursive strategies to translate it, always a choice of certain domestic discourse over others. Hence, the domesticating process is totalizing, even if never total, never seamless or final. It can be said to operate in every word of the translation long before the translated text is further processed by readers, made to bear other domestic meanings and to serve other interests. (Venuti "Translation, Community, Utopia" 482-483)

Regardless of the efforts of the translator, invariably the reader wants to pull the foreign toward the familiar, if for nothing else than to understand it. And the translator knows this well before deciding what to translate. Even the inclination to foreignize a translation, revealing the source language through an intentionally erratic use of the target language, is experienced in reference to a domestic sensibility. That is, the text seems foreign because it is not how people usually talk in the locale of the target audience. However, when the cultures are so disparate as Iran and America, and further complicated by magical metaphors and virtually untranslatable idioms, even the best attempts to domesticize a text inevitably encounter something so alien that it defies that tendency. In both the Talatoff/Sharlet and the Farrokh translations we find occasions where the works are punctured by something so foreign to the target culture that it is either left ambiguous or footnoted.

Talatoff/Sharlet, in their efforts to dutifully create a text that most mirrors the style of the original, at times end up foreignizing the English translation. There are often sentences that simply do not make clear sense in English, or are such a departure in the translators' attempt to

create as close to a word-for-word translation as possible that although the English makes sense, it utterly fails to transfer the intended meaning of the original, as often happens when idioms are translated verbatim.²⁸ This, however, speaks strongly to the initial didactic function of the Talatoff/Sharlet translation. They collaborated on a project with the specific intention of using this translation process as a method to advance their grasp of a new language, English for Talatoff and Persian for Sharlet. Given that they were still coming to master their craft, it is not surprising that at times there are outright misinterpretations in their largely word-for-word translation of Parsipur's narrative. However, a standard reader of the work would not at all notice this outside of two possible scenarios: either both the Persian and the English texts are being read simultaneously, or the reader is armed with such an intimate knowledge of Persian that in reading any English translation they would be automatically translating the text back into the original in their minds and thus creating a psychic parallel version. Only under these circumstance would a reader be able to mark occasions when an idiom was literally translated into some phrase that may not seem illogical, however is nonetheless entirely devoid of the intention of the original.

On the other hand Farrokh employs some brilliant affectations that attempt to introduce extremely subtle nuances of Persian culture into his work. At times though, Farrokh's own erudition overshadows his work and imposes a formality that is quite absent from the original. He tends to raise the tone of the language in his translation, sometimes for glorious effect, but often as a deliberate exaggeration of the original.

²⁸ To be clear, here I am speaking strictly about linguistic mistranslations that misconstrue the intended meaning of the original – examples appear later in this chapter. I am not making claims about translators needing to interpret “intended” meanings when authors themselves often are nebulous about what they were thinking when they were writing.

One Novella – Two Translations

Kamran Talattof is a professor of Persian literature and Iranian culture at the University of Arizona. He is a prolific and well-respected translator of Persian into English and after translating *Women without Men*, he went on to translate another work by Parsipur into English, namely her best-known novel, *Touba and the Meaning of Night*. His partner in translating *Women without Men* was Jocelyn Sharlet, professor of Comparative Literature at University of California, Davis, where she is a specialist in Middle East language, literatures, and culture. Their decision to bring not just this text, but Parsipur herself, for the first time to a broader audience, in particular to an English-reading one, is founded on their belief that this work expresses an understanding of the human condition that reaches far beyond any one culture bound to any single language. Talattof writes:

Our decision to produce a translation through which the sociopolitical paradigm and its discursive power in *Women without Men* would be meaningful to readers in a different time and cultural setting was based on the belief that some of the book's basic themes—including underlying cultural assumptions and problems around gender—hold universal relevance. However, to translate or transfer such complexities through a guest language means conveying not only words, metaphors, and indications but also the intonations and verbal twists that always add meaning to syntax and to the text's message in the original language. The combination of these elements and the author's innovative use of language in breaking taboos about sexuality provided ample incentive to translate the novel. (174)

Their choice for translating this text was predicated on the belief that this was not an exclusively Iranian story but a global one. That Parsipur herself adopted stylistic features from ancient cultures of the Semitic world as well as recent ones on the opposite side of the planet supports this instinct. However, in consideration of the style of translating this work, Talattof more concretely explains the reasoning behind some of his choices in his translator's preface to *Touba and the Meaning of Night*. Translating in a similar style, he explains that his choices inclined

more toward fidelity to the original than toward supplementary explanations for the new audience: “It was with careful consideration, therefore, that we made the decision not to create a glossary or insert footnotes, even though at every turn of the page the translation called for explanation” (Talattof “Translating Women...” ix). Talattof explains his decision to avoid impeding the readerly experiences with contextual explication. Rather than infuse the translation with editorializations, the translators chose to foreignize the translation. They bring the complexities and nuances of the original to the target audience and allow them the freedom to experience the style of the original, even if at times they must sacrifice coherence and meaning. The hope here is that the astute reader will recognize that something is amiss and ideally take it upon herself to complete the necessary background research to make sense of the narrative.

Faridoun Farrokh is an emeritus professor of literature at the Texas A & M International University, specializing in Persian literature, 18th century British literature, and translation. Although his translation of *Women without Men* lacks any sort of translator’s note or preface to offer insight regarding his practice and direction, a side-by-side comparison of the choices he made against those by Talatoff/Sharlet readily reveal his decision to fill in the potentialities for misunderstanding of Persian allegories and idioms with the use of contemporaneous commentary and even a few footnotes. This opposition manifests the paradox that Schleiermacher sets up as the first of many choices translators must make in their process. He writes:

Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him. These two paths are so very different from one another that one or the other must certainly be followed as strictly as possible, any attempt to combine them being certain to produce highly unreliable result and to carry with it the danger that writer and reader might miss each other. The difference between these two methods, as well as their relationship to one another, should be obvious at once. (Schleiermacher 49)

Where Talatoff/Sharlet seek to render a translation as lexically identical to the original, moving the reader toward the writer, Farrokh fills in gaps between cultures by creating a text that thus moves the writer to the reader.

An excellent illustration of the disparity in translational ethos can be found in the opening lines of the chapter “Zarrinkolah.” The chapter describes the life and seeming mental breakdown of a prostitute who had been living in a brothel since childhood. Parsipur’s original Persian text transliterates as, “*Zarrinkolah 26 sal-e vah fahesheh bud. Dar shahr-e no kar mē kard, khane-ye ‘akram tala*” [Zarrinkolah was 26 years old and a prostitute. She worked in the New City, in Golden Akram’s house] (77). In the Talatoff/Sharlet translation this line is rendered as: “Zarrinkolah was twenty-six years old and a prostitute. She was working in the New City at Golden Akram’s house” (71). But in the Farrokh translation, he writes, “Zarrinkolah was twenty-six and a prostitute. She lived at Golden Akram’s brothel in the city’s notorious red-light district” (61). While the Talatoff/Sharlet translation leaves the name of the New City without explanation, Farrokh drops the formal name altogether and generalizes for his audience the function of the place. When a reader unfamiliar with Tehran’s urban layout comes across the term “New City,” he or she may perhaps infer by the rest of the passage that this could refer to the red-light district. The Farrokh translation though avoids the possibility of a confused reader who may not necessarily realize that “New City” refers to a district rather than some other actual city. A reader who does misread this as such is then drawn to imagine an inaccurate landscape where the relations between characters may not be so proximally connected. This choice works both ways. By bringing the audience closer to the original as the Talatoff/Sharlet translation does, the reader experiences an intimate insight; however, by bringing the text closer to the audience as Farrokh’s translation does, the reader more readily accesses the salient features of this character’s life and

environs. Neither is necessarily better, as there is a possibility for misunderstanding as well as deeper understanding as a result of either choice.

Although there is not a single footnote, endnote, or supplementary explanation anywhere in the Talatoff/Sharlet translation, Farrokh inserts five footnotes to explain phrases and concepts that might be particularly vexing for a non-Iranian audience. The first of these appears in reference to the city of Mashad, Farrokh's footnote reads, "A holy city in northeastern Iran where the eighth imam in the Shiite tradition is buried" (14). The curious aspect of this note is that initially it would appear that the narrative is entirely unaffected for readers whether they are privy to this information about Mashad or not. Farrokh's reading of the narrative intimately links the character of Munis to this place when he asks the reader to depart for a moment from the narrative to receive this information. It is no longer simply a city other than Tehran where the rest of Munis's family have gone to for a couple of days. Farrokh elevates this passing reference to a semblance of its proper cultural position laden with the profound religious importance that Mashad represents for Iranians. Although the full gravity can scarcely be expressed in his brief note, the effect on the reader, especially on an Iranian one, is intentional. For Iranians, Mashad is the holiest site in the country and to make pilgrimage there suggests devotion to religion, as well as social and class leanings. To be able to make the nearly 550-mile trip from Tehran to Mashad in the early 1950's would demand several days of freedom from work, in addition to the means to make the trip. Moreover, apparently doing it motivated by sincere piety, not obligation because somebody recently died, was about to marry, or was affected by some other circumstance that would have bound them to go, makes it all the more significant. It is also important to remember that all of this is occurring during the tumult of a violent uprising raging in the streets of Tehran. As we see in this scene, to leave the house for any reason, much less if

you are a woman, would have been considered an act teetering on the brink of stupidity or insanity.

Although there is no dearth of obscure cultural references in the thirty pages separating the first footnote from the second, Farrokh chooses to insert the following note to explain the colloquial use of the Persian term *Shazdeh* that appears in Parsipur's original. He writes, "The title 'Prince' is often given informally to individuals who are either descendents or relatives of the former royal family, the Qajar dynasty" (47). The term is used at the beginning of Farrokhlaqa's first chapter when she recalls Fakhroddin's reemergence in her life at twenty-three years of age, after he travelled to America. Having not seen one another for about a decade, they are both married to other people but, for the first time, openly confess their love for one another using the film *Gone with the Wind* as a metaphor. This film is an apt comparison for expressing the antiquated yet persistent markers of a time long past, still reflected in the desperation of people clinging on to meaningless, at best, or more often, racist and ignorant brands of status and entitlement in a modern era. Despite giving this minor insight into fairly recent Iranian monarchic history, Farrokh fails to explain that the last of Qajar kings, Nasir al-Din Shah, much like his predecessors was a glutton for excess, in particular with women. His harem was noted for having over a thousand wives and concubines. As a result there is a great surplus of these so-called Princes, so much so in fact that the word and status are in many ways moot.

We should be careful though before confidently pronouncing too categorical a reading of the text. Rahimieh prescribes a greater hospitality in the reading of Persian literature. She writes:

If Persian lives continue to be written, they must speak to an audience whose expectations are different from the ones the critics bring to bear on their readings. I would suggest that we begin to read differently. In the paradoxical juxtapositions of the need to conform to imperatives of personal modesty and the tendency toward self-aggrandizement, for instance, we might uncover signs of a struggle to articulate the self both within and outside the communal frame of

reference. The ways in which these competing demands play themselves out determine the form and style of narratives that together make up the history of Persian understandings of the self. But even this approach will not be able to construct a definitive truth of the self, for self-discovery and self-construction are complex processes that will always leave traces of concealment and disavowal. (*Missing Persians* 159)

Given that there are those who still distinguish themselves to this day with entitled remnants of days past, still taking their societal status and role quite seriously, adopting a more nuanced reading will expand the lens through which we contemplate their experiences. Farrokh's pithy explanation could potentially lead a casual reader to misunderstand, rather than better comprehend, the flexibility of this title.

The third footnote, similar to the first, expounds on the religious purport of a figure rather than a place in Iran. In his footnote, Farrokh explains that the "Holiness Ali" mentioned in the dialogue is "Ali-ibn-Abitalib, Prophet Mohammad's nephew and the first imam in the Twelver Shitte tradition, highly venerated in Iran" (64). Although prefacing the name "Ali" with "Holiness" could certainly express this figure's Islamic privilege, Farrokh feels it is necessary to further underscore Ali's particular significance in Iran. This bit of cultural explication may seem trivial to a reader with minimal understanding of Islam; however, to someone with even cursory knowledge of the religion, with this short sentence about the paramount influence of Ali in Iran, Farrokh is pointing out one of the most critical disparities between Suni and Shiite Islam. This fact is further emphasized by the occasion in the narrative when Ali is invoked. Zarrinkolah has something to confess to her new confidante, a fifteen-year-old girl recently inducted into the brothel as the newest prostitute, so she pulls the girl into her room. She says that she can no longer keep a burning secret inside and must share it with somebody, to which the young girl replies, "Of course one has to confide in someone. My grandma told me that when His Holiness Ali couldn't find anyone to trust with his thoughts, he would go into the desert, lean into an

abandoned well, and tell his secrets” (64). Feeling inspired by this anecdote about Ali, Zarrinkolah admits that for some time she has not been able to see the heads on any man she encounters. By weaving Ali with Zarrinkolah in this scene, Parsipur aligns the prostitute with Ali, the second holiest figure in Shiite Islam; Ali in the desert, and Zarrinkolah in a brothel in the red light district of Southern Tehran; he screamed into a well, and Zarrinkolah whispers to this girl, both receptacles for desperate truth. Despite the overt variances between the Imam and the whore, Parsipur brings them together through the human condition.

In one of the later chapters, when Farrokhlaqa has taken to writing poetry, she inserts herself in one of her poems, but shortens her name to Fari, which Farrokh notes is “A nickname for ‘Farrokhlaqa,’ here a *nom de plume*, occurring in the last couplet of the poem, a common practice in the Iranian classical poetic tradition” (95). Again Farrokh is giving the reader information that bears little weight on the events unfolding in the narrative as this bit of insight changes nothing, unless of course the reader is astute enough to track the intricate metaphoric use of names by Parsipur throughout the text. In which case, this footnote is crucial for bringing to a foreign reader’s attention that this word “Fari” is in fact another crafty manipulation of character’s name. Moreover, by explaining that this is a common trope in Persian poetry, he embeds her poem within a long Iranian literary tradition and Farrokhlaqa’s ambitions. Potentially a keen collusion on Farrokh’s part to suggest through his footnote a subtle way of emphasizing a feature of the narrative, Farrokhlaqa’s ostentatious aspirations, while also offering an interpretive hint, Parsipur’s commentary on nomenclature.

Farrokh’s final note tries to explain the Iranian cultural practice of *siqeh*²⁹, essentially a temporary marriage that can last between one hour and ninety-nine years. A person can

²⁹ “*Siqeh*,” like most transliterated terms can have multiple spellings depending on which scheme is being employed. Farrokh spells it: *siqeh*, whereas Haeri prefers: *sigheh*.

temporarily marry a prostitute and have sex without committing the sin of sex outside of wedlock. The note appears near the end of the book during Fa'iza's final chapter when Amir Khan suggests that she no longer commute back and forth from Karaj so often by herself, and instead ought to come and live with him. The impropriety of living with a single woman of her age would be overwhelming, so he suggests that they "enter into concubinage," which is Farrokh's translation for *siqeh* (107).

Haeri explains the distinctions in the marriage ceremonies of Iran as follows based fundamentally on the final intention of the parties involved³⁰:

Temporary marriage is a contract between a man and an unmarried woman, be she a virgin, divorced, or widowed, in which both the period that the marriage shall last and the amount of money to be exchanged must be specified. In a contract of *mut'a* marriage witnesses are not required, and the marriage need not be registered, although in practice both conditions have been subject to variations and local requirements. The life expectancy of a temporary marriage is as long-or as short-as the partners wish it to be: from one hour to ninety-nine years. At the end of the specified period the temporary spouses part company without any divorce ceremony. Ideologically, *Shi'i* doctrine distinguishes temporary marriage, *mut'a*, from permanent marriage, *nikah*, in that the objective of *mut'a* is sexual enjoyment, *istimta'*, while that of *nikah* is procreation. (2)

Haeri, though, recognizes how readily the idea of a temporary marriage can be profaned in the minds of people foreign to the multifaceted traditions of Islam/Iran, especially given how quickly

³⁰ The term *mut'a* here is being used interchangeable with *siqeh*. The *mut'a* is the actual marriage contract, whereas *siqeh* is the individual. Haeri explains the use of the term as follows:

The term *sigheh* literally means the legal form of a contract. Colloquially, it may be used to mean the form, the way, or the formula for doing something. It may also imply a transitory situation. When, why, and how the terminological change from *mut'a* to *sigheh* took place is not quite clear. The shift may have occurred, suggests Dr. Ja'far-i Shahidi, the director of the Dihkhuda Institute in Tehran, in the mid-nineteenth century when *mut'a* had become quite popular because of the indulgence of the Qajar royal family in the custom. He postulates further that the change might have come about because of the populace's penchant for abbreviation. Instead of saying *sigheh-i mut'a*, the legal form of a *mut'a* contract, those who practiced it might have dropped the ending and gradually referred to it as *sigheh* only (personal communication 1981). In its current usage, *sigheh* has a pejorative connotation and is popularly applied to a woman who is temporarily married, but not to the man. Moreover, a temporarily married couple is seldom, if ever, referred to as married, *izdivaj kardih*, but is said to be a *sigheh*. Following an Iranian practice, I shall use the term *sigheh* as both a noun and a verb. (75-76)

Iranians themselves reprimand it. Too easily these cultural distinctions can be dismissed as antiquated idiosyncrasies rather than complex representations of an ancient society still unfolding in a modern world that beget deeper inspection. Haeri writes:

Mut'a marriage is an institution in which the relationships between the sexes, marriage, sexuality, morality, religious rules, secular laws, and cultural practices converge. At the same time it is the kind of custom that puts religion and popular culture at odds. Whereas religiously there is no restriction for virgin women to contract a temporary marriage, popular culture demands that a woman be a virgin for her first permanent marriage. The institution of temporary marriage brings into focus theoretical issues concerning relationships between systems of rules, values, and meaning, on the one hand, and systems of action and decision making, on the other. The obliviousness of many Iranians toward *mut'a*, or their derisive attitude toward the institution, mask its pervasive though submerged influence in almost all aspects of social life. (3)

Again the complexities of this culture cannot be reduced to *siqeh* as merely prostitution by another name. Despite that being exactly what this practice is so much of the time, there are nuances to this act that speak to a variety of cultural conditions that drive the need for it. Something else to keep in mind is that at the time of the narrative, 1953, the temporary marriage was still a bit of a furtive act, until it was officially sanctioned in Iran by Khomeini's 1983 fatwa.

In any case, Farrokh writes, "In some Islamic communities relationships with so-called concubines are religiously sanctioned and are considered common-law marriages" (107). Much like the other notes, this one does not add anything particularly critical to the reader's understanding of the plot. The little bit of context it provides is insufficient considering the myriad layers of this cultural component. Farrokh seems conscious of a tendency by his readers to be most vexed by the intersection of Islam and Iranian traditions and as a result his footnotes all attempt to develop a clearer picture of some of the more complex manifestations in that culture.

None of these notes categorically changes the understanding of the text by a foreign reader, but all of them invite a contextual insight that is more important to recognize on a meta-level than in regards to explicating the narrative. As much as these notes offer the reader small moments of insight about an Iranian landscape, they actually divulge more about the translator than they do about the source text or Iranian culture. If Farrokh had cluttered his translation with footnotes on every page, as there are veritable occasions for deeper explanation on nearly all of them, then his translation could be perceived as aimed at delivering the narrative, as well as offering exacting and consistent cultural clarification throughout. If he had gone the way of Talatoff/Sharlet, then, like them, he would have chosen to let the text speak for itself and if the reader were confused then the onus would be upon the reader to independently research alien concepts. Farrokh only explains five terms in his entire translation and not a single one is required for a foreign reader to understand the story. With each interruption of the reading experience by the translator, the reader is pulled out of the magic realist landscape offered by Parsipur and delivered a brief commentary by an intermediary who inserts his interpretation of concepts, figures, and places that he feels a reader ought to further consider before proceeding. Much as Farrokh supplements Parsipur's source material throughout for the smoothest English rendering possible, he also complicates that flattening of the foreign with these sporadic moments when he forces the reader to contend with the very foreignness he so often unravels.

Although many of the choices made by the translators differ in regard to the adding of extra details to the source text for sense by a foreign audience, in some cases even Talatoff/Sharlet recognize that some degree of fidelity must be forsaken. In the beginning of the second chapter, "Fa'iza," Parsipur's original gives a date based on the Solar Hijri calendar that is used in Iran and Afghanistan, which starts in the year that Mohammad made his pilgrimage from

Mecca to Medina with the New Year at the vernal equinox. Both of the translations opted to change this into a Gregorian format; however, neither of them correctly managed the temporal transfer. Parsipur's original text transliterates to: "*Saat-e 4 bad az zor ruz-e 25 mordad sal-e 1332...*" [4 in the afternoon on the 25th of Mordad in the year 1332] (19). Talatoff/Sharlet translated this as: "At four o'clock in the afternoon on the twenty-fifth of August 1953..." (13). Farrokh translated this same line as: "...at four in the afternoon on August 5, 1953" (10). The 25th of Mordad, 1332 is actually August 16th, 1953. What makes this disparity even more striking is that this is a rather outstanding day in Iranian history, as it was on this day that the CIA carried out the coup that overthrew the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran, Mohammad Mossadegh. Again, at the beginning of the next chapter, "Munis" in the Talatoff/Sharlet translation or "Munis Part One: Death" in the Farrokh, both of the translations change dates as such and once more fail at correctly transferring it. Parsipur's original "*Saat-e 4 bad az zor ruz-e 27 mordad 1332...*" [4 in the afternoon on the 25th of Mordad 1332] (36). The Talatoff/Sharlet translation is: "At four o'clock in the afternoon on the twenty-seventh day of August, 1953" (29). Whereas the Farrokh translation reads: "At four o'clock in the afternoon on August 7, 1953" (24). The 27th of Mordad in 1332 is actually 18 August 1953. Although both translations are internally consistent, that is, in each translation the dates are off by exactly the same number of days, they are nonetheless both off.

These are critical passages for they are the sole occasions in the entire novel that exact times and dates are given. From this the reader gleans whatever contextual understanding of the events surrounding the action of the narrative. It is also from this singular reference that the filmic adaptation fabricates a complex landscape surrounding the events of the CIA coup in Iran as a salient background that is merely implied in the novella. That both of the translations sought

to bring the foreignness of the Solar Hijri calendar to a clearer understanding for an audience certainly more familiar with a Gregorian one seems like a practical choice; however, that neither of them actually got the corresponding date correct, moreover a date that is of poignancy for any Iranian scholar, is not just surprising, but would *seem* to be necessarily intentional. When in fact it was quite the opposite.

At the February 14th Women without Men Symposium that I focus on in Chapter 3, I asked both teams of translators about this error. Kamran Talattof explained that it was simply an oversight that occurred prior to “translating in the age of Google.” The very contextuality of translation and the need for retranslation could not be clearer than just in this simple example. Translations are fixed in time because they are speaking to a particular audience for an exacting purpose, which is why we retranslate works of importance for new ages and people. What is particularly curious however is why Farrokh also flubbed the date, since he was working well into the Internet age and could have simply found the correct conversion in a matter of seconds. And here we simply have a mistake. The contextual binding of the translator reveals not just the landscape from which she or he is operating, but also small details about who that person happened to be at the time. If nothing else, we can see how the limits of technology at any time can more than justify retranslations.

There are however also occasions where the Farrokh translation is more in line with the Persian original. A stark example of this can be found in the overall organization of the chapters. In the original table of contents the chapters are named and organized as follows:

Mahdokht/ Fa’iza / Munis (part first) / Munis (part second) / Munis (part third) /
Mrs. Farrokhlaqa Sadraldivan Golchereh / Zarrinkolah / Two girls on the road /
Garden of Farrokhlaqa (part first) / Garden of Farrokhlaqa (part second) /
Mahdokht / Fa’iza / Munis / Farrokhlaqa Sadraldivan Golchereh / Zarrinkolah.

Similarly Farrokh's translations named and ordered the chapters as follows:

Mahdokht/ Fai'za / Munis Part One: Death / Munis Part Two: The Rebirth/ Munis Part Three: The Rebirth / Mrs. Farrokhlaqa Sadroddin Golchereh / Zarrinkolah / Two Women on the Road / Farrokhlaqa's Garden: Part One / Farrokhlaqa's Garden: Part Two / Mahdokht (Reprise) / Fai'za (Reprise) / Munis (Reprise) / Farrokhlaqa Sadroddin Golchereh (Reprise) / Zarrinkolah (Reprise).

The Talatoff/Sharlet translation changes names and even combines what are three separate Munis chapters above into a single one:

Mahdokht/ Faizeh / Munis/ Mrs. Farrokhlaqa Sadraldivan Golchereh / Zarrinkolah / Two Girls on the Road / Farrokhlaqa's Garden / The Garden / Mahdokht / Faizeh / Munis / Farrokhlaqa Sadraldivan Golchereh / Zarrinkolah.

For the most part, Farrokh maintains greater fidelity to Parsipur's original insofar as the organization and naming of the chapters. Despite Farrokh's consistent supplementing of the text in the body of the narrative to enhance the reader's understanding of foreign rites and customs, here he chooses to follow Parsipur quite exactly. More curious, however, is Talatoff/Sharlet's decision to take a rather gross liberty in unifying several chapters, whereas in the rest of their translation, they stick to Parsipur's work almost word for word. Although Farrokh takes the relatively mild liberty of adding "Reprise" to distinguish the second appearances of the characters in the last five chapters from their introductory ones, this is rather in line with his tendency to offer supplemental clarity to his audience. Talatoff/Sharlet, on the other hand, in fact re-write the book, and deriving some methodology from their other translational choices, this decision must be intended to achieve a meta-fidelity to the force of the original, even if it means they had to re-order the book to achieve that end.

A more exacting manifestation of this intention by Talatoff/Sharlet appears in the spelling of the names of the characters. Even ignoring the transliteration of Persian to English for most of the names, the disparity between the Talatoff/Sharlet and Farrokh renderings of Farrokhlaqa's

middle name as “Sadrdivan” versus “Sadroddin” begs notice. The Persian original quite exactly transliterates to the Talatoff/Sharlet version of “Sadrdivan”; Farrokh’s “Sadroddin” is an entirely different word. Although perhaps a seemingly innocuous pronunciation shift, when considering what is gained or lost by changing this word in this way, one could argue a potentially powerful interpretation has been overlooked. In the original Persian the last two syllables of the name are “*divan*”, which can refer to a high-ranking body of Persian government or a collection of poems usually used in connection to the works of Rumi or Hafez. Considering the role of this character in the narrative, whose husband is a government official that she kills with a punch and whose political ambitions and poetic/artistic leanings surface when all the women meet in the garden in subsequent chapters, this translational choice, as small as it is, allows or excludes a series of potential interpretations and deeper narrative linkages.

Farrokh’s audience shares some features with that of Talatoff/Sharlet, but the context of the text has changed. Since the first translation, a well-known Iranian artist, Shirin Neshat, has made the novella into a moderately successful independent film. *Women without Men* may have been the first of Parsipur’s works to be translated into another language, but since then most of her major works have been rendered in various languages. Talatoff/Sharlet opened the door to a global readership for Parsipur. Waiting on the other side evidently was an eager and curious audience who wanted to learn about the experiences of women in Iran in this last century. Farrokh filled in the gaps left by the Talatoff/Sharlet translation. Where they opted for stylistic and linguistic fidelity to the original, Farrokh focused his efforts on attempting to carry across the meaning of the text. He quite liberally made choices that may not have overtly affected the narrative, as the agency of events remains quite intact; nevertheless, how they are enacted is far

less nuanced in his translation, and his campaign to insure an intelligible understanding of the landscape and history by a foreign audience is overt.

Filming Words

Shirin Neshat and longtime collaborator Shoja Azari spent more than half of a decade working on adapting the book for their film. Neshat had been making art films and video installations for a long time before this, but this was her first foray into the narrative feature filmmaking. Together, she and Azari wrote the screenplay and directed the film; Steven Henry Madoff was brought in during post-production to help clean up the subtitles and write additional material to tie the movie together. In analyzing Shirin Neshat's filmic adaption of Parsipur's novella, we are allowed to consider two aspects of translation not yet considered: obviously, how medium effects message, as well as the constraints of subtitles, as Neshat's film is entirely in Persian with English subtitles. Neshat's film takes many liberties in its interpretation of the text. She entirely cut out one of the principal characters from the book, Mahdokht, who Neshat describes as being "too far out" for even an independent film; she changed cultural references in the book; and most significantly, she shifted the central focus of the text by critically embedding the narrative within the 1953 CIA coup to ouster Prime Minister Mossadegh (Heartney). Although Parsipur makes some oblique references to the tumult occurring in Iran around this time, and offers two passing references to the date some of the events take place, the magic realist style of the text bends temporality to such an extreme degree that by and large these dates are inconsequential to the unfolding of the events in the narrative. At most, the events of the coup and the riotous consequences in Iran lightly shade the landscape in the novella. However, in Neshat's film the coup is privileged to a degree that departs from Parsipur's story in an

overwhelming way. In the Foreword [*sic*] to the Farrokh translation of *Women without Men*, Neshat explains some of the challenges and resultant choices she and her co-director Shoja Azari had to make in producing their filmic adaption:

We faced many barriers, including the fact that magic realism is notoriously difficult to turn into a screenplay. Among other obstacles were how to develop the stories of five main characters with equal importance in a single narrative. Each female protagonist was unique in her socioeconomic background, and emerged with a radically different emotional and moral predicament. Even more challenging, some of the characters were fully realistic while others were highly allegorical. So along, the way, we had to make difficult decisions such as eliminating one of the characters, Mahdokht, who was the most magical protagonist among the women. [...] We also took other liberties and expanded the historical and political aspects of the narrative, most specifically the CIA-organized coup of 1953, which remains in the background in the novella.” (ix)

Neshat’s decision to frontload the events surrounding the coup in no small way rewrites Parsipur’s story, especially in translation. The events of 1953 are of immense consequence for an Iranian audience; therefore, when they encounter the references to that year in the first couple chapters, that audience would immediately understand the gravity of the context surrounding the women in the novella. Although there are only vague references to the rioting in the streets, the coup had a startling effect on the psyche of the nation. Neither of the translations in fact makes any effort to express the significance of the dates Parsipur inserts in her novella, largely because they are of little consequence to lives of the women. Neshat’s work however grounds the entirety of her plotline in reference to the coup. The focus of the story is splintered between the women’s stories and the effect the coup is having on them. In fact, nearly every scene reflects the political landscape informing her film, from radio news broadcasts describing the daily events of the coup to protests turned combative to characters and events entirely made up for the film that do not in any way occur in the novella. Other than the dates and references to the tumult in the streets in the second and third chapters of the novella, and again in the second Fa’iza chapter, which states

that she visited Twenty-fourth of Esfand Square, the notorious site where the Shah's army gunned down demonstrators during the 1979 Islamic Revolution, there is not a single direct mention of anything remotely related to the coup in the entire novella. This does, however, present us with another set of discreet choices made by the translators/interpreters.

In the original text, Parsipur refers to the place that Fa'iza goes as "*maydan-e 24-e esfand*" [Twenty-fourth of Esfand Square] (131).³¹³² Unsurprisingly, Talattof/Sharlet translate it literally as, "Twenty-fourth of Esfand Square" (123). But curiously, Farrokh writes, "Victory Square" (106). Following the Revolution, a lot of streets in Tehran were renamed to reflect the changing ethos and power structure; as such, "Twenty-fourth of Esfand Square" is now called "*Enghelab Square*" [Revolution Square]. The word for "victory" is "*piruz*," which happens to be another square in Isfahan. Why would Farrokh completely rewrite Parsipur's original, changing the name of the square from its prerevolutionary name to something more in line with the Islamic Republic? And then, why did he get the name wrong, or is he purposely thwarting space here in his translation as Parsipur does with time in her use of *The Sound of Music* in Chapter 1? It is such choices that question whom the audience is that he is addressing and how do these alterations speak to them?

As he explained during the *Women without Men* Symposium, his audience includes a current reading public as well as a future generation of folks who may not as of yet even realize they are his audience. His aim to teach to a class that does not exist drives him to make certain concessions in service of preserving original style, while transporting meaning across vast social,

³¹ "*Esfand*" is the name of the twelfth month of the Iranian calendar, beginning in February and ending in March. The word though has significant cultural resonance as it is also the name of a common weed found in Iran, wild rue. Historically the plant has been used in homeopathic remedies as well as spiritual ceremonies, especially the burning of its seeds to avert the evil eye. As either the name of the month or this weed that is regularly burned as a cultural ritual, the word is a common one that carries both literal and symbolic gravitas.

³² The "Twenty-fourth" here in "Twenty-fourth of Esfand Square," is meant to commemorate an event occurring in the month of Esfand, not an address, such as "1600 Pennsylvania Avenue."

contextual, and temporal chasms. Much like his footnotes that offer the most cursory review of a deeply complex cultural element, here Farrokh may be bending the original just enough to beget further inquiry not by this audience-in-formation, but by those people familiar enough with Tehran to recognize his oversight. He teases them into deeper analysis, perhaps to bring to light the atrocities that occurred there when it was called something else, suggesting that you can change a name, but not necessarily bury history. It may or may not bear fruit ultimately; however, as a point of analysis, it definitely speaks to the pedagogical utility of translated texts at large, as well as his particular pedagogic application in translating.

Neshat bypasses this conundrum since she cuts this scene from her movie, but does show a sequence where protesters are gunned down in the streets during a protest. These various layers and effects across the different iterations of this single reference/scene/occasion allow us to clearly see the depth of possible interpretations drawn from just a single word, for the difference between *esfand*, *enghelab*, and *piruz*, does not just encapsulate a semantic distinction, but in fact reveals time, space, and socio-political realities, as well as the locus of emphasis and attention on the part of the translator.

In addition to cutting out characters to tell her version of the story, Neshat also created backstory for other characters that would punctuate some of the characters as players in the coup. This is true in particular of Farrokhlaqa Sadroddin Golchehreh's husband, simply referred to in the text as Golchehreh. In the novella, he is a bitter man who seemingly relishes nothing more than tormenting his wife, who eventually hits her breaking point and sucker punches him in the belly, sending him to his death down a flight of stairs. His life and occupation are not in any way described in the novella, but in the film he is presented as a high-ranking military officer with absolute loyalty to the monarchy. Neshat's film has a sequence wherein he is being decorated for

some military achievement that never appears in the novella but acts to heighten the combative relationship he has with his wife. Pompously bloated in his military uniform, Neshat embellishes his character to fit into the fractured Iranian society of the coup era. It seems that Neshat merged the character of Golchehreh and that of Mr. Merrikhi, whom Farrokhlaqa meets at the end of the novella and who does receive a medal of sorts, but ironically not for military service, rather for his work helping the poor.

Neshat goes even further with Munis who engages in a communist subterfuge that is not even remotely insinuated in the novella. Neshat translated Parsipur's story in such a way that the characters and original plot serve merely as vehicles for a new story that is far more politically charged and offers a broad glimpse of the lives of marginalized people living through a coup. In some ways, Neshat did to Parsipur what Parsipur did to *Arabian Nights/1001 Nights*. Both borrowed critical elements and twisted them in exacting ways to tell a different story; it is not necessarily a new story, but perhaps, more accurately, a new chapter in a long unfolding history, a different perspective on the same events.

Made with support from Robert Redford's Sundance Institute, shot almost entirely in Morocco, and funded by various European sources, Neshat's film, upon inception, spoke to a much broader audience than Parsipur could have ever intended when she wrote the novella. Given that Neshat's film is entirely in Persian, but is made by and for an international audience, it has subtitles. Limited by neither the breadth nor the depth of the idea, subtitles are entirely bound by and to the time it takes to express concepts. Never burdened with considerations about how long the reader will spend or moreover get to spend with the text, the temporal is an aspect of literary translation that rarely concerns translators as a written text usually remains unaffected and outside of time. However in subtitling, the temporal aspect of translation is paramount.

Subtitling often forces the translator to alter her immediate word choice not for something better, but for a word or idea that will fit inside of the limited parameters of the time window. This challenge is only compounded when working with languages that fundamentally function as differently as Persian and English, most particularly the inverted placement of the verb at the end of the sentence in Persian as opposed to immediately after the subject in English. Working around this issue often requires translators to retreat and consider the message as a whole rather than as a series of word units amounting to a complete idea. Drawing back from the immediate phrases in order to communicate the total meaning can grace the translator with a different understanding of the ideas and thus allow for a deeper communion with the source concepts.

Translators usually have the luxury of expressing idioms, colloquialisms, and poetic phrases that might appear as a few words in the source language into several lines, paragraphs or even pages of text in the target language. With some translations the translator is not only afforded, but expected to exhaustively contextualize a concept from the source language with cultural references, footnotes, and citations of other appearances of the word or concept – basically whatever it takes to carry the idea across to the new language. The subtitle does not allow for any of this.

Perhaps the translator's curse, subtitles forsake much of the intimacy we routinely characterize as critical to our work as translators. We are not allowed to sink into the source culture and explore with the intent of bringing more than just literal meaning across. Subtitles force the boundaries of time upon the translator without allowing for any of the tools we have cultivated to assist us in the process of delivering to the target reader as full of an understanding of the source data as possible. Without the option of endnotes, footnotes, compendium texts, translator's prefaces or notes, the translator is forced to create a translation that bears the burden

of all the cultural nuances without any of the mechanisms to accurately render them. Nevertheless, as much as all of this demands a new rigor from the translator, it also opens the door for certain poetic moves on her part. For all that is missing from the translator's toolbox when subtitling, he does have the benefit of having his words accompanied by sounds and images. Discovering methods to manipulate language toward a viable rendering with an anemic pallet of words either crushes the spirit of the translator or induces her to imagine innovative paradigms to transfer new ideas in experimental territories. Nornes describes the challenges of subtitling as a sort of corruption that occurs due to the limits of the filmic conventions as follows:

Facing the violent reduction demanded by the apparatus, subtitlers have developed a method of translation that conspires to hide its work – along with its ideological assumptions – from its own reader-spectators. In this sense we may think of them as corrupt. They accept a vision of translation that violently appropriates the source text, and in the process of converting the original to rules, regulation, idioms, and frame of reference of the target language and its culture. It is a practice of translation that smoothes over its textual violence and domesticates all otherness while it pretends to bring the audience to an experience of the foreign. (Nornes 449)

This exemplifies what Schleiermacher would refer to as bringing the writer to the reader. In truth the subtitler has little leeway in this situation, specifically because of the rigors of the medium. Bellos details the strict confines that this work must adhere to:

It has become conventional to regard average moviegoers as capable of reading only about fifteen characters per second; and in order to be legible on a screen as small as a television set, no more than thirty-two alphabetic characters can be displayed in a line. In addition, no more than two lines can be displayed at a time without obscuring significant parts of the image, so the subtitler has around sixty-four characters, including spaces, that can be displayed for a few seconds at most to express the key meanings of a shot or sequence in which characters may speak many more words than that. The limits are set by human physiology, average reading speeds, and the physical shape of the movie screen. It's really amazing that it can be done at all. (136)

Unfortunately, film theorists have largely ignored the problematics of subtitling, and even translation theorists tend to concern themselves with it only practically. Nornes writes:

...despite the rich complexity of the subtitler's task and its singular role in mediating the foreign in cinema, it has been virtually ignored in film studies. In translation studies, in contrast, there has been a proliferation of work, but it has almost exclusively concentrated on practical issues for translators of the physiology of the peculiar brand of speed reading demanded by subtitles. (448)³³

The various choices forced on the translator thus manifest in decidedly more stark terms in a film's subtitles than we may encounter in moving a narrative within a single medium from one iteration to another, that is from source to target written languages.

The first of these adjustments/concessions occurs in the opening lines of the film. Munis is standing on top of her family's home, just about to commit suicide. The spoken dialogue says, "*Hala faghat sukut bud. Sukut va dēg-e hēchē,*" which translates to "Now there was only silence. Silence and nothing else." However Steven Henry Madoff,³⁴ the person credited for subtitling the film, chose to render the lines as, "Now I'll have silence. Silence and nothing."³⁵ There is no first-person subject in the original, nor is it implied in common Persian usage. This was a

³³ This fact can be discerned simply by looking at any anthology of essays on either film or translation theory. For example, the standard translation anthology most often assigned by university professors in translation theory courses is the Lawrence Venuti edited *The Translation Studies Reader*, wherein only one of the thirty-two essays on translation even mentions subtitling.

³⁴ In researching the film, I was curious about the process behind the subtitling, Neshat explained in an email, "Steven Madoff does not speak Farsi, he wrote the voiceovers and corrected the subtitles to be good English. He is really an art historian and a critic but also writes poetry so this was a rare collaboration for him" (14 August 2014). She then explained that although the dialogue was written by her partner Shoja Azari and herself, Madoff was given "lots of directions and ideas," and the liberty to script original text for the voiceovers.

³⁵ This is, in actuality, not at all the case, as I will explain in the next chapter when presenting Madoff's experiences from an interview I conducted with him about his role in this film's production. Although only credited as the film's subtitler, as well as for "Voiceover text/additional dialogue," Steven Henry Madoff played a much more critical role in the crafting of the film. He not only cleaned up the subtitles originally written by Shoja Azari, but he also suggested they include voiceovers throughout the film to better tie the narrative together. Neshat then asked him to write all of the overdubs for the film. This is all more thoroughly presented in the next chapter, cf. 161ff.; however, I wanted to clarify this present understatement of his role in the production of the film and to state that his being referred to here as the film's "subtitler" is only in reference to the fact that he is the only person remotely credited for the subtitles in the film.

discreet choice made by the translator to induce an intimacy with the principal character of the film, which primarily follows Munis, unlike the book that seems to pay fairly even attention to all of the women. Although this could be simply a negligible choice made by the subtitler to soften the breadth of the gloom from all encompassing to merely a conditional state of a single character, perhaps it is an example of what Bellos calls the “Bergman effect,” that is the inevitable dumbing down of dialogue to fit not just the physical constraints of the subtitles, but also to quickly bridge gaping cultural chasms incapable of being overcome in any effective and efficient way specifically because of those physical constraints. Bellos explains this as follows:

Stringent formal constraints and film translation are believed to have had important retroactive effect on original work. Filmmakers dependent on foreign language markets are well aware of how little spoken language can actually be represented on screenwriting. Sometimes they choose to limit the volubility of their characters to make it easier for foreign-language versions to fit all the dialogue on the screen. Ingmar Bergman made two quite different kinds of films—jolly comedies with lots of words for Swedish consumption, and tight-lipped, moody dramas for the rest of the world. (137)

The absence of equivalence between languages should not deter translation efforts, so much as call for deeper and more compassionate partnership between audience and translator. Like so much of life, strength of plot and narrative ought not be measured in rigidity and exactitude, so much as with flexibility and fluidity. The extent to which the language can be bent, without the narrative losing its shape, indicates both the fecundity of the text as worthy of transmission from an intended audience to larger one, as well as the willingness of the audience to be challenged by seeming abrasions of culturally informed logic in pursuit of foreign cultures. These juxtapositions are precious treasures to be mined in translations as opportunities for further translations and invested inquiry.

Idioms are one of the most challenging tasks confronting all translators, and thus a site for superlative creativity. This is exponentially the case when subtitling. In the scene where

Zarrinkolah runs from the brothel to the bathhouse to wash herself, the *dallak*, a bath worker who helps the bathers wash themselves, tries to scrub Zarrinkolah's back but is quickly upbraided for her efforts. Parsipur writes in the original: "*Dallak aqhebat beh geryeh oftadeh bud. Gofteh bud: zan, bēchareh, mesl ēn keh darē dēvane mē shavē.*" (81) [The washer had finally started to cry. She said: poor woman, it seems like you're going crazy]. Talatoff/Sharlet translate this as: "The bath worker finally broke down crying and said, 'You poor woman, you must be crazy'" (75). Farrokh renders it as: "The masseuse was exhausted and almost on the verge of tears. 'You poor woman,' she said, 'You're insane'" (65). In the film, when Zarrinkolah smacks her away, the *dallak* says: "*Ēn dokhtar-e maalum nēst aslan chēsh hast. Ēnham shod vakht-e ma.*" [It's not clear what is wrong with this woman. And this is what happens to my time.] Madoff's subtitles simply offer: "Crazy woman! What's eating you?" The *dallak* in the film rattles most of her response while there are no subtitles on the screen. In fact, the subtitle fades about halfway through her dialogue, with much of her prattle occurring off-screen while other women in the bathhouse look toward Zarrinkolah with sadness and confusion. Moreover, there are several idioms in this bit of dialogue that are lost. When the *dallak* says it is not clear what is wrong with this woman, certainly that she is off is implied, but what is overlooked is that which defies implication across cultural lines with such paltry indicators. To be diagnosed as insane is at the very least conclusive. What the *dallak* is saying here is actually perhaps worse. There is something clearly wrong with Zarrinkolah, but the real tragedy is that what is wrong is unknown. Moreover, it is so unknown, that it may be unknowable, thus irresolvable, and so truly the *dallak* has wasted her time trying to help her. Life is precious, time is limited, and there is no reason to waste any bit of it on such utterly lost causes. None of this is carried over in the subtitles, but how could it be? And in many ways, it simply does not need to be. Subtitles are constructed with

supreme practicality in mind given the rigors of the time, space, and reading ability of the audience. However, what is lost there is supplemented by the enhanced interpretative opportunities availed by film, namely sounds and images.

A more curious choice by the filmmakers occurs when we are first introduced to Farrokhlaqa. The scene is quite different from the book as it is not a flashback and there is no mention of a villa. In fact, in the film the scene takes place after Farrokhlaqa's husband, Sadri, is awarded a medal for his military service, a juncture in his work life nowhere expressed in the original text. In the lobby, while Sadri is being congratulated by his colleagues, Fakhroddin and Farrokhlaqa discuss their long suppressed feelings for one another. However, unlike the book, where they are using *Gone with the Wind* as a metaphor, with Farrokhlaqa being compared to Vivien Leigh, in the film Neshat changes the reference to *Mogambo*, with Farrokhlaqa reminiscent of Ava Gardner. This is not a choice made by the subtitler, but by the filmmakers. Besides both starring Clark Gable, *Mogambo* bears other striking similarities to *Gone with the Wind*. Both are romance films, set in places remote to the film audience experience, an African jungle searching for gorillas or a Southern plantation during the reconstruction period in America. Although in the two movies the lead male character is split between two loves, whereas in the book Farrokhlaqa is the one torn by her involvement with the two men, the unbalanced dimensions of a love triangle persists. Neshat compares the love triangle in *Women without Men* to the context of *Mogambo*, a story set as far from the embattled streets of 1953 Tehran as could be. There are several possibilities underlying Neshat's choice, and as viewers of the film, we have to accept that we will likely not know why she did it. And frankly, the effect produced is marginal at best. It could be that Neshat's decision here may be to enhance the peculiarity of the reference. Perhaps she felt the actress she had chosen for the role of Farrokhlaqa was more

reminiscent of Gardner than Leigh. Or, she simply liked *Mogambo* more and wanted to allude to it.

Ultimately *why* she did it does not matter so much as *that* she did. Cutting the character of Mahdokht from the film was a strong decision and she later explains her reasoning;³⁶ comparatively, this change is almost trifling. This choice would be entirely neglected unless somebody had read the original book, in Persian or in translation, seen the movie, and was incisive enough to catch the deviating references. But if translation seeks to teach the foreign through a familiar language, then Neshat was making a grand gesture toward her own process with this seemingly minute adjustment. This could be a subtle tip of the hat to other interpreters as an esoteric acknowledgement of shared challenges. For as much as translators and subtitlers can convey, there are fundamental nuances and wonders embedded in the artistic process that defy explanation but demand consideration.

Translation: A Bother Worth Bothering With(!/?)

Having looked at the differences in choices made by these translators, we are left to ask why. In this chapter, we looked at the rhetorical effects of the choices and some of the translation theories and traditions that each of the choices adhere to; however, we have yet to consider what is really gained from the project of retranslating a text. As Bellos suggests, the real determination of the quality of a translation is bound up with whether the new text carries with it the force of the original. This is, however, confounded by suggestions that the original in its original language holds some ineffable quality that is lost in the act of translation. Quite commonly this notion of the ineffable arises in the translation of religious texts. In what may be one of the

³⁶ For Neshat's explanation of why she cut the character, cf. 102, 155.

boldest acts of translation, Jack Miles's *God: A Biography* asks whether the creator's life can be written, to which he answers, "The Bible is unquestionably an unusual work of literature, and the Lord God is a most unusual character. But one of the two key premises of this biography is that neither the work nor the character is so inhuman that interpersonal appraisal is out of the question" (15). The task of the translator, it would seem in such cases, is to figure out a way for the message to not be riven from its transcendental purpose, despite the inevitable consequences of transfer from one person to another and then another and so on, a process similar in kind to the telephone game that children play in grammar school, where one person whispers a message in the ear of another and this person whispers what they think they heard to the next person, continuing until the message goes from ear to lips to ear of every person in the room. Invariably the message suffers some degree of mutilation in the transmission. Sometimes what results is a mild mutation that forces contention of the purpose and force of the original in this newly imposed context; other times the message is enhanced or clarified, perhaps better enunciated even. In any case, the change is inevitable, but it is clearly not ineffable.

The sheer possibility that the message could be uttered and shared refutes the resignation of impossibility. Benjamin's task upon the translator to find "that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original" suggests that translation itself is a language outside of languages (Benjamin 79). The curious melding of source and target within a text that stands outside of both languages qua those languages themselves, but as a synthesized use of a language to carry the force of a message in another language, creates a new "universal language." The translator is asked to tap into her being to cultivate linguistic movements and concepts not naturally inclined to the target

language, but now applied in service of bringing to light something new from a foreign source language.

Benjamin's transcendental ideal of translation speaks directly to the fundamental pedagogic force of translation. Until we devise a language so muddled that it surmounts Babel and speaks to us all, translation is our conduit. In the next chapter, the rare privilege of asking translators why they did what they did will allow an analysis of how their unique aims manifested in the choices they made. And although, as we saw in this chapter, their translations reveal vastly different styles and choices at play, the ethics underpinning these choices are pedagogically and pragmatically aligned.

CHAPTER 3 – TRANSLATIONAL ASYMPTOSIS: A HERMENEUTIC INQUIRY

To bring the author and translator together is rather uncommon, but to have two discreet translation teams meet for a conversation about their choices and drives creates an extraordinary situation. For a variety of reasons, ranging from the fact that much of the time original authors are long dead by the time their work has ascended to the status of being translated to the common inclination of translators to avoid direct contact with the author, this kind of meeting scarcely occurs. Even amongst the prodigiously erudite audience in attendance at the *Women without Men* Symposium on February 14th 2014, none could recall a similar occasion.

With *Women without Men* as the object of inquiry for the day, Shahrnush Parsipur, Kamran Talattof and Jocelyn Sharlet (the first team of translators), and Faridoun Farrokh (the second translator), engaged in frank conversations about narrative, translation, intention, audience, theory, practice, influence, and market realities. Participating in the panels throughout the day were Franklin Lewis (University of Chicago), Mohammad Ghanoonparvar (UT Austin), Blake Atwood (UT Austin), Nasrin Rahimieh (UC Irvine), Ngũgĩ was Thiong'o (UC Irvine), and myself – the audience also drew Jack Miles (UC Irvine) into the conversation and noted publisher of Iranian literature, Kamran Jabbari (Mazda Publishers). Using the insights shared during this Symposium, we are able to address the effectivity and actualization of their aims in the text itself. Questions about interpretation and over-interpretation find resolution in this context and allow for a deeper investigation of reception.

Whereas in the previous chapter we looked at the technical choices made by translators, here, drawing from their own discussions about the method, we can consider the broad motivations behind their choices and compare the unique processes behind each iteration, as well as the critical junctions that drove both of these translation productions.

Foundational Thoughts

¹Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ²And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’ ⁵The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. ⁶And the Lord said, ‘Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.’ ⁸So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11.1-9)

This passage is generally considered to be the first recording of humanity’s despair about the challenges of a multilingual world, as well as the source of countless theories about human communication. In an email, Miles notes that this passage reveals, “the true origin of multiplicity in language is God’s determination to *frustrate* easy, universal cooperation among mankind. At the time when mankind is one community with one language, they resolve to build a city with a tower whose top reaches heaven” (17 July 2014). It is not that God merely confuses their language, people are scattered around the planet. As such, the tale serves an etiological function.

Miles explains:

[The story offers a mythological explanation as to] why humans are everywhere and everywhere speaking mutually incomprehensible languages. Buried in the tale, however, is the promise of godlike powers when all humans can communicate freely, which is to say, then, that the prior condition—that single human language—was a language of divine power. In mythic terms, translators attempt to ascend to that status quo ante and then descend to the world of punitive dispersal.

Steiner reminds us that “The affair at Babel confirmed and externalized the never-ending task of the translator – it did not initiate it” (49). For a long time, translation was considered nothing more than a blunt technical tool in service of sophistic development, as Venuti explains:

Translation theory as we know it today, the formulation of concepts designed to illuminate and to improve the practice of translation, did not exist in classical antiquity. When commentary about translation first appears in the West, it tends to take the form of passing remarks, not systematic arguments, and it is situated in the academic discipline of rhetoric. Indeed, the first influential commentators – Cicero, Pliny the younger, Quintilian – are all distinguished Roman orators who consider translation as a pedagogical exercise for aspirants to the their profession. (*Translation Studies Reader* 13)

It is not until Jerome’s “Letter to Pammachius” in 395 CE that translation theory is considered as a discipline not subordinate to some other course of thought perceived as more profound, but as critical for basic access and thus development of foreign ideas.³⁷ Jerome’s translation of the Bible into Latin, the Vulgate, would become for centuries the standard version used by Catholics. His driving principle and fundamental contribution to the field of translation was to make choices based on the transfer of meaning rather than word for word transposition, a perspective that would dominate translation praxes for nearly the next millennia and half. The divine orientation of his work demanded application of an ordering principle that would allow the gospel to broach its holy magnitude regardless of how far beyond the original logos it echoed. The mysticism that we find in Benjamin’s prescriptions for the translator draws from a similar source, but manifests more inherently humanistic ideals. Where Jerome sought to bring any people closer to God, Benjamin saw translation as capable of bringing people closer to each other through the divine essence of a pure language, in a sense bringing God closer to people.

³⁷ Bellos offers a pithy insight about the greatest of misunderstandings regarding translation, he writes: “It’s a well-known fact that a translation is no substitute for the original. It’s also perfectly obvious that this is wrong. Translations *are* substitutions for original texts. You use them in the place of a work written in a language you cannot read with ease” (37). Without translation the circulation of ideas necessary for a cosmopolitan worldview is impossible.

Translators have been called everything from traitors and dragons to revealers of gnostic secrets, but nothing has defined the work of translation in the last century as much as Benjamin's "Task of the Translator." Celestial in its demands upon the translator and almost juvenile in its idealism, this work by a man in Germany during the years following World War I cannot be considered outside of its immediate context nor its literary heritage. In many ways it operates as an index of thoughts on the subject of translation. Working to synthesize the history of ideas between Jerome and himself, Benjamin sees a world falling apart and calls upon translation to be the thing to keep it together.

In 1923, as this essay is written: the Nazis attempt but fail to overthrow the government in the Munich Beerhall Putsch; Germany's bank rate is raised to 90%; French and Belgian troops occupy the Ruhr region of Germany; and the German government declares a state of emergency. It is no wonder that Benjamin seeks comrades of thought who will aim to create cultural artifacts that, no mere decorations for the world, actually bring to light a "kinship" of humanity through shared language and ideas. He writes:

If the kinship of languages manifests itself in translation, this is not accomplished through a vague likeness between adaptation and original. It stands to reason that kinship does not necessarily involve likeness. The concept of kinship as used here is in accord with its more restricted common usage: in both cases, it cannot be defined adequately by identity of origin, although in defining the more restricted usage the concept of origin remains indispensable. [...] [A]ll suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole – an intention however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of the intentions supplementing each other: pure language. While all individual elements of foreign languages – words, sentences, structure – are mutually exclusive, these languages supplement one another in their intentions. Without distinguishing the intended object from the mode of intention, no firm grasp of the basic law of the philosophy of language can be achieved. [...] In the individual, unsupplemented languages meaning is never found in relative independence, as in individual words or sentences; rather, it is in a constant state of flux – until it is able to emerge as pure language from the harmony of all the various modes of intention. Until then, it remains hidden in the languages. (78)

Benjamin ultimately appears less concerned about the unique contents of any message, and more focused on how the languages themselves are being carried toward a unified purity by the desire of people to experience the ideas.

The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original. [...] Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at the single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one. [...] not only does the aim of translation differ from that of a literary work – it intends language as a whole, taking an individual work in an alien language as a point of departure – but it is a different effort altogether. The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, graphic, that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational. For the great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language is at work. This language is one in which the independent sentences, works of literature, critical judgments, will never communicate – for they remain dependent on translation; but in it the languages themselves, supplemented and reconciled in their mode of signification, harmonize. If there is such a thing as a language of truth, the tensionless and even silent depository of the ultimate truth which all thought strives for, then this language of truth is – the true language. And this very language, whose divination and description is the only perfection a philosopher can hope for, is concealed in concentrated fashion in translations. (80)

Translation comes to serve as a tool for the betterment of humanity by revealing the similarities of experience despite seeming differences in language. From the simplistic to magnificent, translations teach us about each other and ourselves, and the more deeply we engage with them, the more purely we can communicate with our fellows. The intention is what matters, and as long as that is aimed toward the divulging of kinship, then the translator is dutifully completing her task.

Benjamin created a theory of translation for a modern world that necessitated a purer form of communication. Given the surplus of chatter that inevitably would foment the potential for misunderstanding, a beacon needed to be erected to ethically guide translators not to solely fulfill their tasks, but to do it with a deliberate attentiveness toward a broader pedagogic end. The

earliest translators recognized translation as in service of some other academic pursuit, but if we focus on the work itself, the process of translating serves as an excellent tool for understanding ourselves as much as, if not more than, it allows us to understand others.

Steiner creates a functional framework for the development of Western translation theories and practices from Jerome through Benjamin to the present day that conveniently categorizes the evolutionary leaps into four periods:

1) The classical period, about 46 BCE through the early 1800s:

The first period would extend from Cicero's famous precept not to translate *verbum pro verbo*, in his *Libellus de optimo genere oratorum* of 46 B.C. and Horace's reiteration of his formula in *Ars poetica* some twenty years later, to Hölderlin's enigmatic commentary on his translations of Sophocles (1804). This is a long period in which seminal analyses and pronouncements stem directly from the enterprise of the translator. [...] The main characteristic of this first period is that of immediate empirical focus. (248)

2) The period of "theory and hermeneutic inquiry" that emerges from the German Romantic movement at the start of the nineteenth century:

This second stage is one of theory and hermeneutic inquiry. The question of the nature of translation is posed within the more general framework of theories of language and mind. The topic acquires a vocabulary, a methodological status of its own, away from the demands and singularities of a given text. The hermeneutic approach – i.e. the investigation of what it means to 'understand' a piece of oral or written speech, and the attempt to diagnose this process in terms of a general model of meaning – was initiated by Schleiermacher and taken up by A.W. Schlegel and Humboldt. It gives the subject of translation a frankly philosophic aspect. The interchange between theory and practical need continued, of course. (249)

(3) The "Linguistics" period starts at about the middle of the twentieth century, as General Linguistics develops into the prevailing discourse of the times:

The first papers on machine translation circulate at the close of the 1940s. Russian and Czech scholars and critics, heirs to the formalist movement, apply linguistic theory and statistics to translation. Attempts are made, notably in Quine's *Word and Object* (1960), to map the relation between formal logic and models of linguistic transfer. Structural linguistics and information theory are introduced

into the discussion of interlingual exchange. Professional translators constitute international bodies and journals concerned mainly or frequently with matters of translation proliferate. (249)

(4) Steiner's last period focuses on the "metaphysical" aspects of language:

Certain differences in emphasis have occurred since the early 1960s. The 'discovery' of Walter Benjamin's paper 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', originally published in 1923, together with the influence of Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, has caused a reversion to hermeneutics, almost metaphysical inquiries into translation and interpretation. Much of the confidence in the scope of mechanical translation, which marked the 1950s and early sixties, has ebbed. The developments of transformational generative grammars has brought the argument between 'universalist' and 'relativist' positions back into the forefront of linguistic thought. As we have seen, translation offers a critical ground on which to test the issues. Even more than in the 1950's, the study of the theory and practice of translation has become a point of contact between established and newly evolving disciplines. It provides a synapse for work in psychology, anthropology, sociology, and such intermediary fields as ethno- and socio-linguistics. [...] The adage, familiar to Novalis and Humboldt, that all communication is translation, has taken on a more technical, philosophically grounded force. [...] Classical philology and comparative literature, lexical statistics and ethnography, the sociology of class-speech, formal rhetoric, poetics, and the study of grammar are combined in an attempt to clarify the act of translation and the process of 'life between languages'. (250-251)

Both of the translations of Parsipur's text fall squarely in this fourth period, largely due to the genre of the source text, as well as the pragmatic interests driving the translation projects.

Women without Men is a story that seeks to create a fusion of horizons between men and women in its original culture, and each of these translations continue the fusing beyond just gender to the reach across cultural, national, and social thresholds.

In consideration of the impact that Benjamin's push for a "pure language" has had on translation in the last century, as well as the tremendous need to clarify communication methods in an evermore globally and instantaneously connected age, we should first contextualize translators' efforts within the rigors of this high-minded ideology in context before we look at their experiences.

Translators Feel Deeply

Translation, like sympathy, is aimed toward understanding the other; however, both are founded upon the truism that perfection is impossible and never the final purpose.³⁸ With sympathy, we try to appropriate a phenomenological feeling for what another subject experiences, literally endeavoring to feel with a different person. Likewise, in translation, we seek to realize the comprehension of something foreign. Both processes are exercises in asymptosis, the pursuit of things that remain ever beyond reach, aligning us with three mythological asymptotes: Sisyphus, Tantalus, and Prometheus. And like them, we ought to be diligent in our efforts and remember that the goal is not arrival at a conclusive destination, but rather a continued pursuit. To translate is to be continually trying.

Sympathy is the experience that allows the translator to approximate the motivations of the author. A necessary but not sufficient condition for translation, the process of moving ideas from one language and culture to another can be a technique to derive sympathy. Following from Ngũgĩ's notion that "any language has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture," translation is both a technical act of moving ideas between source and target linguistic societies, as well as a dialectical exercise that proposes a transcendental threshold for learning from a stranger (Ngũgĩ *Decolonizing* 13). The translator splits herself between two minds, languages, and cultures to invite understanding of something foreign by an audience that

³⁸ In the phenomenological tradition, empathy/sympathy have been addressed in different ways. Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein addressed it as quasi-perceptual acts of recognizing the other as another subject instead of object. (Husserl *Ideas* 2; Stein *On the problem of Empathy*). Some of these early phenomenologists were discussing empathy/sympathy as perceptual recognition, but there's a parallel tradition of literary interpretation and hermeneutics that considers empathy as a form of perspective taking and understanding the other with more narrative depth. My work draws from both of these theoretical lines, but, with a stronger inclination toward the latter, especially as problematized by Gadamer (*Truth and Method*). For a nice overview of empathy in the philosophical tradition see Steuber (2006).

accepts they are ever only privy to the ideas that survive the transmission from source to target. There will be conceptual casualties, inverted idioms, and even abject mistakes. Every metaphor contains a mobile army of misinterpretations and all dots are not created equal, which is to say half of an umlaut does not make for one third of an ellipsis. Misunderstanding is more likely than perfect communication in translation, and this unshakeable awareness enforces a more calculated engagement by the translator with her task. It is because of this necessarily deeper investment that translators experience the sort of sympathy that allows them to bring to light the furtive relationships between people and cultures through the kinship of languages.

Given that translations are a forced coercion of disparate languages into the comprehensible whole that Benjamin referred to as “pure language,” every translation is acutely metatextual, a text cognizant of its contrived existence. Thus, every translation expects to be embraced as something more than its original, “For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of World Literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life” (Benjamin 73). The original text will never know the translation, but the translation cannot help but to examine itself in comparison to its antecedent. Being a mutant text synergized from both source and target languages into something radically new both embarrasses and empowers the translation. Translators’ inevitable recognition of this paradox perhaps explains the self-deprecating pathos shared by so many of them. Constantly echoed by almost every translator at some point or another is the Herculean challenge invariably endured during any translation. Much of this pressure though also seems to stem from the translator’s disposition as the portal for entry into the minds and experiences of the foreign. The translator reincarnates the text for a new people, and this metamorphosis makes obviously daunting demands.

It is thus unsurprising then that Benjamin's task upon the translator often sounds like a futile attempt to articulate the impossible. Benjamin realizes how monumental of a mission he saddles upon the intrepid few who decide to attempt translation. He admits that viewing translation as a pursuit of pure language makes "roads toward a solution seem to be all the more obscure and impenetrable. Indeed. The problem of ripening the seed of pure language in a translation seems to be insoluble, determinable in no solution" (80). But it is exactly this challenge that makes the translator's task such a necessary one. Benjamin generously doles to translators their due credit for operating at the frontier of bringing humanity together by revealing the mystical kinship that unites us all. As much as he creates a seemingly monolithic expectation that no translator would ever want to confront, he also comforts us with a deep understanding of what matters most in translation is the intention of the original and the degree to which that is delivered in the target text. He vacates traditional translation binaries of "fidelity and freedom," recognizing that the translator needs to be given the freedom to perceive fidelity as conditioned by original intent, not the particular phonemes utilized in the source text. Nevertheless, with this liberty comes responsibility from which sprout anxieties and self-doubt.

Translation theorists no less authoritative and experienced than Willis Barnstone describe the "translation as being in exile" (266). Spivak reveals her own misgivings when she describes her feelings about translating *Chotti Munda ebong tar ti* by Bengali author Mahasweta Devi. She writes: "Translation is as much a problem as a solution. I hope the book will be taught by someone who has enough sense of the language to mark this unavoidable failure" (95). Not even Ricoeur is immune from such anxieties. He explains:

The translator meets with this resistance at numerous stages of his enterprise. He encounters it, at a very early stage, as the presumption of non-translatability, which inhibits him even before he tackles the work. Everything transpires as though in the initial fright, in what is sometimes the anguish of beginning, the

foreign text towers up like a lifeless block of resistance to translation. To some extent, this initial presumption is only a fantasy nourished by the banal admission that the original will not be duplicated by another original; an admission that I call banal, because it resembles that of every collector facing the best reproduction of a work of art. He knows about the most serious flaw, i.e. not being the original. But a fantasy of perfect translation takes over from this banal dream of the duplicated original. It reaches a peak in the fear that, being translation, the translation will only be bad translation, by definition as it were. (5)

Although Ricoeur clearly lays out this problematic, he quickly offers his salvation with a simple maxim a couple pages later: “give up the ideal of the perfect translation” (8).

Considering the particular issues faced in translating from Persian to English, Mohammad Ghanoonparvar’s *Translating the Garden* offers an exhaustive account of his experiences while translating a text from Persian into English and thus offers a unique internal perspective of the process. Detailing the moment he first finds the text through the submission of the final rendering for publication, Ghanoonparvar’s confessional-like text pays astute attention to the minutia of his feelings throughout the entire process and reveals the emotionally conflicted embeddedness of the translator within the source text. This condition instigates an exploration of social, cultural, and linguistic hospitality that serve as a precursor to sympathy, which may then allow for a mystical transcendental oneness of translator and author in the creation of a new translated text, perhaps broaching the lofty ideal that Benjamin established as the “task” of every translator.

Throughout *Translating the Garden*, Ghanoonparvar exposes the challenges he endured during his translating process, in fact despairingly confessing in his introduction, “in practice every translation is inevitably a failure, with occasional moments of success” (2). Ghanoonparvar so thoroughly remains within the clutches of his desperate eluding of “failure” that it seems impossible for there to not be some ultimate benefit to be drawn from these emotional tensions, especially in such telling passages when the work appears more torturous than transcendent,

producing remarks such as, “translators, like myself, who frequently lose their self-confidence, feeling utterly helpless and incompetent to properly translate the simplest of sentences” (21). Even when his work is progressing smoothly, the translator’s insufferable self-doubt has so thoroughly infected his soul that Ghanoonparvar writes, “I have learned by experience that quite often when a translation seems easy or moves forward smoothly, I am either missing something or messing something up” (29). For every claim Ghanoonparvar makes that speaks to the betterment and comfort of the translator, he offers a counter-argument that thoroughly trounces the leading point: “It is sometimes uplifting for translators to feel that they fall short of rendering some profoundly meaningful and beautiful line in a poem by a grand poet. Most failures of translators, however, are very much like my example above; they are not very uplifting” (45). Ghanoonparvar seems incapable of exorcising the poltergeist of “failure” from his translation experience, especially since the specter of presupposed inadequacy always seems to haunt the translator no matter what she does:

As a proponent of “faithfulness” in translation, altering the text is not what I generally favor. But, in practical terms, I could not possibly (at least consciously) reproduce the syntactical errors of an original text in translation, because, as I have noted earlier, when a translation is successful, usually the original author gets the praise for having written a masterpiece, but if it fails or even reproduces the failures of the original the translator gets the blame. (65)

Ghanoonparvar’s panic peaks when he wonders if he simply attempted to tackle a project beyond his capacities, remarking, “At this point, I am utterly at a loss. Have I chosen a text that is beyond my comprehension and hence beyond my abilities as a translator?” (87). His candor throughout the text makes clear the severity of the strictures and expectations he places upon himself and his practice. That Benjamin, Barnstone, Spivak, Ricoeur, and Ghanoonparvar share this heightened sense of duty, the consequential concerns and doubts they express speaks to their investment in the work, and such concerns are indispensable to note as normative for a

translator's internal state. Moreover, that they all persist with the work despite the drudgery suggests that the need to communicate the complex lessons and ideas surmounts the emotional toils experienced by the translator.

From its earliest roots, translation has been fueled by a didactic agenda. Whether in service to a broader scholarly project or as a domain of inquiry in themselves, translations instruct, and like all lessons, some of them are more valuable than others. Many are not just prone to cause harm, but constructed so as to result in the most damage. The translator is asked to transmit information, and in that basic function is empowered to instruct if he does his job well, or corrupt if he does his job poorly by accident or on purpose; he can serve then as either teacher or traitor. The worth of the translator's practice is the transmission of the meaning, but the translator's experience is measured by an intrinsic recognition of how close his production is to the reason behind why he did the translation at all.

Given the pittance that translators are usually paid, we can almost categorically remove financial reward as the impetus behind any translation project. The translator's agenda is thus usually manifested in how successfully the translation produces an intended effect upon the new audience. The effect could be as simple as communicating a thought or as complex as carrying the weight of an entire culture.³⁹ Although the intrinsic drives, experiences, thoughts, and beliefs of translators are almost never expressed, during the *Women without Men* Symposium the translators discussed exactly these concepts. In exploring the intersection of individual phenomenology and the socio-cultural productions of these translators in their engagement with Parsipur's work, we can assess how "successful" their work was based on their own subjective criteria, i.e. aims.

³⁹ See Ngũgĩ *Decolonizing the mind* referenced earlier in this chapter on 127.

The First Translation

In the summer of 1995, a graduate student sat alone at Princeton University trying to learn English by translating a book he believed not only would help him do that, but also advance a particular cultural agenda by introducing it to an American readership. As he was in the process, a member of his cohort came up on him and asked what he was doing. He explained that he was translating this novella from Persian to English hoping to develop his language skills. Seeing the opportunity to both help her colleague as well as to use the process to her own advantage, she asked if she could just watch. Of course, he obliged.

As Kamran Talattof worked on bringing the Iranian concepts in *Women without Men* to an American audience, Jocelyn Sharlet soon proved to be more than a friendly shadow, as she became an asset for helping him unpack and speak to an audience he was just beginning to learn how to address. Talattof, a scholar newly arrived from Iran, began a two-month long collaborative project with Sharlet, a New Jersey-raised American. Both of them were invested in the literature and culture of the Middle East, and each had a particular agenda that this process was aimed at unfolding. Sharlet was a second-year graduate student who had a rudimentary grasp of Persian; and although Talattof had a stronger grasp of English vocabulary, he lacked an intimate understanding of how to command the language so as to mold it around such foreign concepts. They quickly realized that while either of them could likely botch the project on their own, collaborating they would instead be able to more deftly work through ideas and successfully articulate a rich and nuanced text.

Talattof states that his reason for translating may have been inspired to some practical degree by the prospect of bettering his English, but his choice of text was entirely scholastic. He recognized a burgeoning literary movement that demanded academic attention, and *Women*

without Men was perfectly situated for both his professional no less than personal motives. He explains:

The translation of that work was not an accident; it was not a random decision. It was very much related to a broad project that I'd taken up related to a contention that I had at the time that in the post-Revolutionary period, under the Islamic Regime, for the first time we can witness the rise of a feminist literary discourse. [...] This discourse did not exist prior to 1979. It came into existence as a reaction to the mandatory veiling codes as well as to the limitations that the new ruling elite put on women's activities, women's participation, and the fact that women's bodies, and I mean literally women's bodies, became once again a battleground between the forces of tradition and the advocates of modernity. And we saw this on the streets of Tehran. I went back to Iran, I was there when the first women's demonstrations against the mandatory veils took place. [...] So when I came back to graduate school in the United States, I came back with this very strong awareness about the women's situation in Iran. And I saw *Women without Men*, with which I had become familiar with a couple of years, or maybe even one year, earlier, in 1989. I read that book, and right then I decided that this is an important part of that shift. This book represented that shift. And it doesn't matter whether it was written before or not, that's not how we in literary analysis deal with these issues. Really, we don't even talk to the authors. (Talattof, *WwM* Symposium, panel 2)

Talattof remains conscious of and foregrounds his translation as a scholarly production motivated by political exigencies. The political agenda that he recognizes operating in the text seems obvious to him as pertinent to, and perhaps even necessary for, people well beyond an Iranian audience. Farrokh likewise mentions during his talk that although he envisions a primary audience, there are these other audiences-in-information he imagines when crafting his work. Both of them have a particular vision in mind that they see as reverberating past its original aims. That potential for something to grow past what it was originally believed to capable of, is perhaps the binding ethos of every translator. Regardless of how well they translate, there is an optimism that a text can be applied outside of its primordial constraints.

Talattof explains:

Somewhere I wrote that the decision to produce a translation through which the social-political paradigm and its discursive power in *Women without Men* would

be meaningful to readers in a different time and cultural setting was based on the beliefs that some of the book's basic themes including underlying cultural assumptions and problems around gender hold universal relevance. And so here I was kind of thinking of maybe more than as a scholar. I was acting as an advocate for women's causes, because I wanted to -- also for the rest of the world -- to be heard. And with this decision, Parsipur would be translated for the first time. And I thought that there wouldn't be any better representation of the voice of Iranian women at the time in Iran.

Sharlet on the other hand had a far less politically motivated drive. For her the process was doubly pedagogical. She explains that she learned a language and, perhaps more importantly, a useful and productive method to do work:

Of course, Kamran's decision to translate the book was an activist's decision. He chose this book because of its usefulness for thinking about social change. Any translation, but especially between Iran and United States, has that weight to it. So this was my second year of studying Persian, so it was really an exciting learning experience for me as much as it was an academic activity. And I have to say that I highly recommend co-translation because it's fun. There's a lot of work that gets a little dull and tiring on your own that is fun to do with another person. And I think that co-translation is a really enriching experience of cultural production that you can't get in any other way. It's really unique. (Sharlet, *WWM* Symposium, panel 2)

Her exuberant response to the process stands in stark opposition to the anguish other translators express as their process, and it appears that the reason for that may be as simple as she did not do her work in isolation. She also acknowledges the inherent gravitas a scholarly project immediately assumes if the primary subjects are Iran and America. These are necessary considerations for understanding the multitude of factors that shape the person doing the translating. Regardless of the translator's conscious decision to make a political statement, on some level, Sharlet, simply because she was translating a book from Persian to English, was engaging in a form of activism. Moreover, she could not have been immune to the exacerbated resonance as a woman researching the Middle East, learning Persian. By sharing in the

experience, the learning process may not have been any easier and “the weight” no less, but the share each person has to carry is certainly mitigated.

The rarity of collaborative translations is more often a practical challenge, while recognized as valuable, Ghanoonparvar explained that simply, “It doesn’t happen, however, because in practical terms, two people cannot make the time” (Ghanoonparvar, *WwM* Symposium, panel 2). Especially in light of the scarce funding for translation work, its slender relevance for academic advancement, and the intensity of the time investment called for, it is usually a labor of love. Finding two people who love the same thing is not necessarily as difficult as finding two who are competent enough to translate that love for others, agree on a method to do it, have adequate resources to carry them for the duration of the project, and accept that the reward is more in the journey than in the destination. However, what we see in the Talattof/Sharlet translation is the unfolding of a process where two neophyte translators were drawn to each other for private reasons that melded together synergistically. That melding is itself a beautiful metaphor for translation.

Talattof is a highly disciplined scholar, and his discussion of his process manifests that. His analysis of the characters reveals that despite his decision to translate the text literally, the process was still vexed by the incredible chasm between source and target languages. Appealing to quasi-universal sympathies that he believed would overcome any hindrance in comprehension occasioned by logical lacuna, cultural curiosities, or tonal oddities, Talattof explains:⁴⁰

To translate or transfer such complexities through a guest language means conveying not only words, metaphors and their indications, but also the

⁴⁰ During interviews I conducted with the translators, Talattof explained that his primary goal in translating *Women without Men* was to carry over the original work’s tone, whereas Farrokh confesses that he was more directly concerned with Parsipur’s style. As such Talattof’s extended discussion of translating the tone in this following passage speaks to that focus.

intonations and verbal twists that always add meaning to syntax and to the text's message in the original language. I remember the conversation very clearly with Jocelyn, wondering how exactly do we translate that intonation. Because to understand that intonation you have to place the book in the context of what was going on. [...] A lot of the mocking tone in some of the character's enunciations were related to that specific time after the Islamic Revolution, particularly in the first 8 years or so.

The combination of these elements and the author's innovative use of language in breaking taboos about sexuality provides ample incentive to translate this novel. And that was when I was really taken by the book, fascinated by the book because the text subverts some of these long held traditional notions of sexuality, in a way, by mocking it. And one of these things is the issue or the concept of virginity. That is so important that in some of my work I have referred to it as the "controlling element" in Iranian culture. And of course these things have changed a lot in the last three years. Thanks to the Islamic republic, it is no longer that important. But this is what it does. And that's precisely the reason it provoked the reaction from the fundamentalists in Iran. They never officially banned the book, but you could never find it in any bookstore's window either. And precisely because of this.

So is the oral speech audible in the English version? Perhaps yes. And why I say yes, it's not only the act of the translation. There are other elements when we translate such books, such seminal and cultural pieces of writing, because women's common experience in the face of social limitations helps the characters' voices be heard across the impediments of translations. A sarcastic tone, an angry response, or a scream may be easily distinguished even in literal translation. In other words, we counted on women's understanding. And for some reason, I don't know if it's right or wrong, every time I write on gender issues or even the few times I've translated Iranian women's writing into English, for some reason I have in the back of mind, my assumed reader/audience is, and I say assumed, who is very different from the actual audience, is women. So I counted on that. (Talattof, *WwM* Symposium, panel 2)

Even when he discusses the literal choices he makes in his translation, he remains aware of his audience-in-formation. Thanks to this enigmatic female populace that may come into contact with his work, and because of specific and subtle linguistic choices he made, he will be able to express ephemeral qualities of the text. That they "counted on women's understanding," suggests a deep analysis of his target audience that would be addressed through shared sympathies. The parts of the text that were left out, or perhaps not as clearly explained as they could have been

with footnotes or supplementary text, were assumed/hoped/conjectured to be carried across by an intrinsic feminine unity.

In explaining his process, Talattof employs a metaphor for translation drawn from Ghanoonparvar's *Translating the Garden*, who writes, "A metaphor often used for the translator is that of a conduit, which is somewhat deceptive yet accurate, if we take into account that the essential components of the conduit—in other words, the cultural and educational background and all that contributes to the intellectual and emotional composition of the translator—affect the material that is transmitted through this conduit" (Ghanoonparvar 2). The translator is incapable of completely excising himself from the process and thus product. The more we know about the translator, the more we can learn about the original work.

This is a particularly apropos moment for this intersection because in Talattof's case, more than any other translator who worked on this book, his subjective drives guided him long before he even chose to work on this text. He was first curious about a broader literary discourse and considered *Women without Men* as an apotheosis of that movement, which also worked practically to help him learn English. This could explain why his translation is so harshly literal at times.

Sharlet, though not necessarily as politically charged as Talattof was during the translation, is no less an analytical and optimistic pedagogue. She is also conscious of the shape of her own conduit and although she had never been to Tehran, much less in the late 1970s as Talattof had, or in the 1950s when the story is set, she was able to tap into a shared sympathy with the character's experiences. She echoes in herself what Talattof hopes to summon in his readers. By drawing on what she knew, as a woman and developing scholar, she could approximate the feelings and beliefs of the characters. She recognizes that the experiences that

shape her being she cannot possibly escape, and they shape her work as much as Farrokh's shape his:

What I notice when I look at Prof. Farrokh's translation and I look at our translation, I notice that they're both great. And I'd use either one of them. Whatever is cheapest for the students for the courses that I teach. I notice that there's an issue of register. I think Prof. Farrokh thinks in a slightly more formal register than we did. And I think that's partly because when we were translating I was really feeling in Fa'iza and also in other characters and I was also feeling like, you know, the language of women I'd known in New York and New Jersey. And it was a middlebrow feel. And the language was very direct. And the play on the title of Hemingway may have nothing to do with the style, but I also found the style very direct. And that was one of the reasons that I could even approach the text with so little Persian background. And I guess that's what gave me that wonderful middlebrow feel for the language that the women were using. But Prof Farrokh's interpretation of it is very different. And I find that very interesting – that we were reading the same text and we understood it in such different ways. (Sharlet, *WwM* Symposium, panel 2)

Reflecting upon the unique elements of her translation compared to Farrokh's, she introduces translation reception into the conversation of translation production, in particular as a teacher.

That she and Talattof made so many different choices than Farrokh is not entirely about the subjective shaping of the translator's conduit. The reasoning behind so many of those differences lies in how the translator's conduit couples with the audience's conduit, and how the process continues to unfold in the new audience:

You receive the text in its English translation, and you further receive the text in the sort of proliferation of the English translation as a cultural product that becomes accessible to new groups of people in new contexts. [...] What the reception is in a broader sense, not just in specific research projects, but in new fields, in different comparative contexts. I think about the world of translation in the world of comparative research, and the only way we can expand our research base is through translation.

Sharlet, like Benjamin, is quite conscious of translation giving a text an afterlife, but it has the same invigorating potential in the life of the scholar. Just as much as translations teach

understanding to the new audience, they avail deeper understanding to the translator herself.

Sharlet explains:

I think about translation in the training of advanced students. And after working with Kamran and having a wonderful experience of helping him to translate [*Women without Men*], I had the privilege of reading *Savashun* in Persian with Jerry Clinton.⁴¹ And I learned a great deal from that. But the fact that translations existed make it possible to have a productive academic experience. You need the original text, but you also need to have a translation. You need to just know it's there. You don't need to look at it. You just need to know it's there. Translation and training at the second year level. Translation and reading in Persian at the third or fourth year level, I'd like to suggest that translation is a special kind of cross-cultural experience that is both self-centered and other centered. It's an adventure in a job that sometimes doesn't seem very adventurous.

There is surplus of information in the world and so many ways to interpret it, as well as classrooms full of students eager to discover difference, as well as sameness in slightly different clothing. Although in so many ways, Talattof's audiences-in-information are politically sparked women, for Sharlet her audience is both the reader and the neophyte translator, like the translator that she was. She says:

We talk too much about translation and don't do enough of it. Because there's so much material and so little time to translate it with the demands of academic life that it might work better collaboratively. When you're translating with other people, in context, you're in touch with the oral language, which is really important because you're trying to think of these equivalents of one expression and another expression. Reception is a performance.

Both Talattof and Sharlet have a variety of distinct allegiances to the academy and society operating in their translator choices, but they share overbearing commitments to broad pedagogical campaigns that unite their aims. All translators aim to expand the life of a text, for better or for worse; like the intrepid pedagogue of ancient Greece who walked children from the known world of their homes into the unknown of the outside world, the translator is the

⁴¹ Prof. Clinton (1937-2003) was a seminal figure in the teaching of Persian language, literature, and culture at Princeton University for nearly three decades before retiring in 2002. He won numerous awards and accolades for his translation of Ferdowsi's epic poem, *The Shahnameh* [Book of Kings].

pedagogue and the child is the text. To expand the mind of the individual, the translator walks the target to the source and hopes they will be better for it.

A Brief Inquiry into Translation Publication, Or, why a Second Translation

Before delving into the Farrokh's reflection on his process, we ought to step away from the phenomenology and high-minded political drives to consider the mundane facts behind this book's retranslation. Anytime a book is translated, somebody had the gumption and time to sit with a text for a long time and likely expect little to no reward for an excruciating amount of work. For it to happen a second time, this same rigor must be repeated. For this to happen twice in a little over a decade, either there must a distinct belief on the part of another translator that she could do better or another contingency has entered that inspires the work. In the case of *Women without Men*, it was entirely the latter. During the opening session of the *Women without Men* Symposium, Parsipur, her translators, as well as a roomful of other translators, publishers, and scholars in the field unpacked the market complications, the life of this text, and how it came to be translated a second time.

When Parsipur initially arrived from Iran, she already had a translation of *Women with Men* in hand completed by Neven Mahdavi, a teacher of English and French, but she did not know what to do with it. Her health was not good, nor was her English, and so finding a publisher was all the more complicated.

She was speaking at a program about human rights in Iran under the Islamic Republic in 1998 at the Riverside Church in New York and was approached by Kamran Talattof who told her he had a completed translation of her novella. He and Sharlet had actually finished it in 1995, but were still waiting to hear back from Syracuse University Press three years later!

Living in a garage converted into an apartment in Northern California, Parsipur's financial circumstances were difficult at the time and she needed money. She thought that when the translation was published she would receive some residual payments. However, Syracuse University Press would only process payment to the publisher in Iran, not directly to the author. This was hugely problematic as Mr. [Mohammad Reza] Aslani, head of *Nogreh* Publishing, was forced to shut down his operation because of government pressure over Parsipur's works. Unable to reach the publisher, Syracuse University Press never paid out any money. Eventually Talattof asked Syracuse University Press to give Parsipur whatever they were going to pay him, and ultimately she received \$1500 from Syracuse University Press.⁴²

Although Parsipur was grateful for the money, she felt that it was Talattof's money as the translator, and that the press should be paying her royalties as the author. The book was growing in popularity in America and being taught by university professors, but still nothing was coming to Parsipur. Eventually First Feminist Press, the publisher of Parsipur's other book *Touba and the Meaning of Night*, acquired the rights to publish the paperback. Talattof explains the obstacles of this publishing contract that continued to prevent Parsipur from getting paid:

Because Syracuse just kept publishing the hard copy, they sold the copyright of the paperback to First Feminist Press. We went through a long negotiation. I had three different meetings between the editors of the two publishers to solve this problem. I wanted more than any one else to include Shahrnush, but according to Syracuse University Press, the author of the books don't get royalties, the publishers do. And they had no access to the publishers in Iran. And that was the dilemma. (Talattof, *WwM* Symposium, panel 1)

First Feminist Press finally paid Parsipur \$1,000 for reasons she does not know. She had no rights to the work according to them, and despite selling it for years with her name on the cover, they did not acknowledge her as the owner of the material. Finally, Parsipur asked the director of

⁴² During the *Women without Men* Symposium, it was at this point that it was settled amongst the translators present that this was about the maximum, regardless of the work, that somebody is paid for a translation. Talattof jokes, "But don't laugh. That's a lot for a translator. It's more than all other royalties I've received for other books."

First Feminist Press what she could do to regain her authorial rights and was informed that if it were translated anew, she would be able to receive royalties. To her, the money was a matter of principle. She says, “I know this book doesn’t sell really, but if it sells fifty dollars, I’d like to have my royalties. It’s something that I think is correct” (Parsipur, *WwM* Symposium, panel 1). Agreeing with the principles at play, Talattof told her he could translate it, but again the rusty machinery of the academic publishing undermined his best intentions. He liked the idea and wanted Parsipur involved from the start, exactly because he believed she was entitled to the royalties from her book.

Nevertheless, when he was asked to retranslate the book, that old pestering self-doubt of the translator crept up on him and he wondered, “Did I do something bad? Is there any mistake there?” (Talattof, *WwM* Symposium, panel 1) He was then approached again and offered the option of retranslating *Women without Men* as well as two other books for a collection of short novels, which quite appealed to him. However, he soon learned that according to the original terms set by Syracuse University Press, both he and Sharlet were not supposed to be involved in any retranslation of the book. He decided to contact Syracuse University Press to determine if there was any wiggle room on this clause in the contract. Much as it took them three years to respond to his initial submission of the translation, they likewise dragged their response to this simple inquiry. By the time he received their message that it was fine to retranslate, he learned that Faridoun Farrokh had already been hired for the job.

The confusing state of who owns the rights to a text challenges the very notion of authority and interpretation. What are the limits to the author’s control once the text leaves her pen? Apparently, less and less as it is further and more widely distributed. Ghanoonparvar points

out that, in fact, the translation is itself a discreet work, recognized on the market and in the world of commodities as a separate entity with a newly defined creator and owner. He explains:

Usually, the custom is that author of the book has the royalties for the original work. When the work is translated and the publisher buys the rights, whatever the publisher wants to do with the author is fine. The translation belongs to the translator. You got to remember that. [...] The principle shouldn't be confused here. The translation is a different work. It is based on that, but the right of the translation belongs to the translator. There are other arrangements that can be made. In other words, the translator can agree to a fee, then the copyright can belong to the publisher or to the author or whatever. But generally speaking, the translation is the work of the translator, not the author.⁴³ (Ghanoonparvar, *WWM* Symposium, panel 2)

⁴³ In fact, fee-for-service is virtually the standard form of translator compensation – someone who tried to copyright a translation as a wholly new work could be prosecuted for plagiarism. (As explained to me in a conversation with Jack Miles, summer 2014.) Having spent many years in the publishing world, Miles clarified some germane details about that industry in an email to me. He writes:

[There are three key elements to grasp] in a sale of copyright: language, place, and time. By writing a circled “C” and your name on the copyright page of your thesis, you have done all that you need do to copyright it legally, though all writers are urged to register their copyrights in Washington. That done, the writer can proceed to *license* a publisher to publish his work in a given language and a given place; the contract will stipulate either for how long the license will last or, if no other limit is stated, under what conditions copyright will revert to the author. A common form of license is “world in English,” meaning obviously that the publisher may sell the work in that language wherever English is spoken. “World in English” rights may be sold even when the work is, say, originally in Spanish. Alternately, rights to a work—say, *Love in the Time of Cholera*—may be sold for North America alone and the author may retain the right to sell English-language rights in the rest of the world to another publisher. Unless the author objects, publishing contracts will typically license the publisher to publish the work in all languages throughout the world and, in addition, license the publisher to sell rights to dramatic or other adaptations of the work, again typically stipulating what portion (commonly 50%) of the proceeds will be owed to the author. Thus, if Parsipur (I presume she had no literary agent) signed a typical publishing contract with her Iranian publisher and Syracuse University Press had seen this contract, then it could only publish *Women Without Men* in English after purchasing the license to do so from the Iranian publisher and proceeds would be due from Syracuse University Press to that publisher, and from the publisher to Parsipur per the terms of her contract with them. If in fact Syracuse University Press published the novel without signing any contract with the Iranian publisher, then I should think they could have skirted the technicalities again by paying royalties directly to Parsipur. But perhaps they did sign some such contract.

Not to go too deep into the secondary matter of publishing, I should say a word about time as an element in copyright. First of all, an author's copyright may expire at his death, depending on national law, or at his death plus X years. Because of the desire of major entertainment companies like Disney to achieve something like eternal ownership of ageless characters like Mickey Mouse, U.S. copyright periods have been getting longer. During copyright, an author may license a work for a stipulated period only or, as noted above, until the conditions for reversion of copyright are met. When a work is “out of copyright,” it is in the public domain, and anyone may publish it without compensating an author or author's heir.

I would add, before moving on, that *pace* Ghanoonparvar, a translation is “a separate entity with a newly defined creator and owner” only with qualification. That is, if Ghanoonparvar were to publish his translation as a work in its own right in English, not mentioning Parsipur at all, he

This is all further complicated by the current political conflicts between Iran and much of the international community, especially those intimate with America. The lack of dialogue about these issues in the area of arts and commerce, especially between Iran and America, results in a lack of precedent and experience insofar as how these waters ought to be navigated. Thus publishers do not know what to do. Franklin Lewis explains:

In the case of Iran though, the whole question is complicated by the lack of Iran's signing the International Copyright Treaty and the complication that even prior to the Revolution, American publishers did not have relations with Iranian publishers. So there is no connection and no basis for writing contracts or even understanding who the publishers and the players are. So the American publishers or European publishers are faced with an unknown, a *terra incognita*, when it comes to what they should do. They don't usually pay the translator anyway. So it's not the money. It's not normally that much of a question. They can't really in most cases make arrangements with the Iranian publishers. So it's an even more complicated situation. (Lewis, *WwM* Symposium, panel 1)

Regardless of intentionality on the part of the translator, and even less so of the author as she is further removed from this threshold moment in the text's reception saga, the story will be interpreted through the lens of current political affairs. Sometimes these conditions can strengthen the themes of the cultural production, as was the coincidental circumstance with the release of Shirin Neshat's film adaptation in late summer 2009. Following the contentious reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the riots throughout Iran's cities, Neshat's movie entered the public arena on a crest of international fervor for the plight of suppressed Iranians. Compounding this even further was the tragic murder of Neda Agha-Soltan on June 20, 2009, shot dead on the streets during clashes in Tehran between those who supported the Islamic

would be guilty of plagiarism and copyright infringement. One reason why translators are rarely paid royalties at all but only paid a one-time fee is that, even after translation, the contribution of the original work's author to the finished product remains so large. *Basta!* I offer this much publishing background simply for what clarification it may afford. Touch up your treatment if you see a good opportunity to do so. (17 July 2014)

Republic and those who saw this botched election as an opportunity to, if not overthrow them, perhaps secure some basic freedoms. A great deal of these freedoms focused on women's rights, in particular issues around the mandatory wearing of the veil in public. All of these events culminated in one summer that climaxed with Neshat's adaptation of *Women without Men* winning the Silver Lion for Best direction at the Venice International Film Festival.

For Parsipur, though, politics have generally been her foe. Not only did she spend time in Iranian prisons twice just for charges related to the content of this book, she also spent another four years in Iran's notorious Evin Prison for her political activities prior to the revolution. Eventually she would be banned from selling her work in Iran, again because of the political elements of her work, especially her frank discussions of women's sexuality. And again, world politics curse the distribution of her texts, as publishers are bound not by restrictions, but by their very absence. Nobody wants to move forward out of fear of the unknown. This bafflement though speaks as much to the external forces imposed upon and inspiring the translator, as it does to her internal ethical influences.

All of these social and political exigencies that threaten the potential for stories to circulate broadly also shape the work of the translator in both a positive and negative way. Given the glut of options about how to carry out a translation, which theories or aims are driving the translator, she can find herself affected by everything from her basic choice in what to translate, which can then be magnified by the manner she translates, to the hermeneutics that drive her specific literary choices. Does she bring the reader closer to the experiences of the writer or vice versa? One offers intimacy, whereas the other suggests comfort. How is the meaning going to be conveyed? Through literality or explication? These are just the most primary of her decisions, and yet as we have seen, each one has a pronounced rhetorical effect that in some cases was

intended to convey complex social messages and other times reminded the translator of her own past experiences to sympathize with rather remotely situated characters. Despite these freedoms, the translator working between such vexed cultures is thus, consciously or not, beholden to the immediate context within which the work is produced. It does not matter when this narrative is set nor when it was written or initially published in Iran; how its translation is received in America in the late 1990s initiates a new life for the text that plays out amidst the props and set of that global stage at that time. Given this assumed role and responsibility, the commensurate authorial command should then also be granted the translator. Ghanoonparvar explains:

When as a writer, you're publishing in, say, Iran, that's between you and the publisher. The rights could belong to you over there or sometimes they belong to the publishers. And that arrangement, whatever it is, is made with other countries internationally. But when the work is translated, that becomes another work. [...] The work that is translated is the work of the translator. [...] I put it very bluntly, you cannot abuse the translator, or use him as a servant. You cannot. He's nobody's servant. A translator is an artist. And a craftsman. And everything else, on his own right. And so, he has rights and she has rights as well. In the unfortunate situation in the relations between Iran and the United States, both before and after the revolution, because of the international copyright laws and all that, in the middle of all this, and most of us who have involved in translation we haven't really given a damn about getting \$12.50 from the publishers. Who cares? We have been trying to promote this literature. And therefore we step back. But the principle shouldn't be confused here. The principle. (Ghanoonparvar, *WWM* Symposium, panel 1)

It is critical to remain focused on the role of translation here rather than get lost in the quagmire of international copyright law and publishing politics, but suffice it to say that the legal and ethical are always involved when national lines are being crossed in the production of cultural artifacts. In some cases, these exigencies are more relevant than others, and between Iran and America, it is clear that it cuts both ways. The same curiosity that can pack audiences in art house theaters around the world can mutate into suspicion and extinguish necessary dialogues.

The translation is a teacher of a domestic culture to foreign audiences. However, it cannot perform this function if its circulation is impeded by oppositions within or between the source and target societies. This is the terrible irony. If learning about our fellows makes us more comfortable with them, then we should be working to create as many things that it takes for us to become friendly with those who make us the most uncomfortable; and it behooves us to take these things we have made and share them. But if the paths for sharing our productions are closed because of the very discomfort that we are attempting to overcome, then it appears that we are caught in an ideological Chinese finger trap, failing to realize that only by resigning our fears and coming together will we be free of the fetters binding us.

The Second Translation

In 2010, primarily to curtail contractual stipulations, *Women without Men* was treated to another translation. Although Talattof was happy to take on the process again, the First Feminist Press decided to offer the job to Faridoun Farrokh. A newly Emeritus Professor of English at Texas A & M University, Farrokh had long been translating from Persian to English. At the *Women without Men* Symposium, he admitted that generally there is no specific translation theory operating in the choices he makes in the production of the text; however, all throughout the process, he remains staunchly aware of a unique audience in choosing the material he translates. He looks at his current students to devise what will be most crucial for them later. This long view of the process positions his work such that it further removes the text from its source context. A translation is already a cultural artifact that is in some ways lost at sea, appearing at foreign shores, long disconnected from the place it came. Farrokh takes this one

step further and navigates his translations toward shores of countries that may not even be inhabited yet.

Farrokh began translating while still living in Iran, mostly manuals and technical materials from English into Persian. From the time he was an adolescent, he was not only a voracious reader but also fascinated with the work of translators. As his command of English improved he began to translate works of fiction. During the *Women without Men* Symposium, he discussed these early experiments:

They were stories in circulation at the time. Mostly stories that had to do with Agatha Christie, talking about the late 40's, early 50's. Sherlock Holmes stories, Arthur Conan Doyle. I'm not sure what the qualities are. I haven't been able to find those translations. They were published in local newspapers. And I started making money. I remember for a translation of one Sherlock Holmes story I received 15 *rial*. At the age of sixteen, I think that was the first money I ever earned with my education. Things haven't improved much since then. (Farrokh, *WwM* Symposium, panel 3)

Once he came to the United States to pursue his education, he was not able to focus as much on translation and really only turned to them for pleasure. Translation has never been a focus of his academic advancement, so as he was working to secure his university position, Farrokh's translations would be driven entirely by his personal curiosities. Given this idyllic translation practice, he was free from ever needing to categorize or identify his work along any established traditions or theories. He explains:

There has not been a coordinated effort to establish myself as a translator. As a result, I haven't really thought about the theory of translation. I've never tried to justify the way I translate. I've never thought about justifying or explaining in any way or to impose on it some kind of structure or some kind of aesthetic. I translate simply by looking at my environment, my intellectual environment, and finding some missing parts in it. Because I'm trained as an instructor in English and that's what I've taught most of the time, doing composition courses most of the time. Later in my career when I started to teach graduate courses, I became more and more aware of the things my students needed to know to become professional writers. And the things I translated seemed like they would be supplying a need in

the cultural landscape where I was active. That's why I've been kind of selective in my choice of material that I translate.

His translation theory is no theory. Like the well-trained composition/rhetoric pedagogue that he is, his practice stems from an indelible attention to the needs of his students. Unlike Talattof, who sought to advance a particular literary discourse in a broader political campaign, Farrokh is driven by more intimate motivations: a personal interest in the work, which he obviously shares with all translators, but also a belief that the work will be of value to his students someday.

Farrokh explains what brought him to the work:

I was familiar with the work of Shahrnush, I had read *Touba* of course. But I had never read *Women without Men* before. The circumstances were such that I received a call from Fereshteh Nourai. She's a professor of Persian or Middle Eastern Studies at the American University in Washington. She had seen two translations of mine, one a story by Mohsen Makhmalbof somewhere online, *Words without Borders*, and a very long short story by Goli Taraghi published in *Boston Review*. She had seen those, and without knowing who I was or where I was working, she'd decided that that kind of style, that kind of approach to translation worked well if I translated her work, *Women without Men*. She called me. She introduced herself and I had just retired, and I was busy doing other projects. She told me she had two works in mind that she wanted me to translate in association with the New York University Press, Feminist Press. She gave me the name of the first novel. And I had happened to have read it, and I didn't like it. I didn't think it dealt with issues that would be of interest to English speakers or to contemporary American readers. Besides I had some problems with the style. Having been a language teacher, I expect a work that is published to have certain language fluency, and a certain facility of expression, that it must flow. I turned that one down. Then she suggested *Women without Men*. And I read it and I was already familiar with her work, so I said I would do this. And I'm so glad I did.

Farrokh was clearly in a much different position than Talattof and Sharlet when this project came to him rather than being sought out as it was by them. The freedom to decide *if* he wanted to do the work immediately offered him a command over the result. *Women without Men* intrigued him as a piece of literature. Seeming almost immune to the political currents surrounding the book, he explains:

The work itself is fascinating simply because it frees itself, it removes itself from the constraints of convention. Although it is generally regarded to be in the magic realism sphere, it's free of the conventions of that even. Because there are certain relationships, certain connections among the characters that transcend the magical and real, supernatural aspects. It's like reading a story about love affairs among angels. If there can be such a thing as a love affair among angels. That's what I mean about the relationships among the characters transcending the convention. And that was one issue. The other issue was the fluency of the language. It is such a masterful piece of contemporary Persian prose without intending to be. It just flows and before you know it, you are inside of the work. It allows you to enter, and stay there, and thrive with the storyline. And I was not quite certain I could do it justice in my translation. I was not even aware that it had been translated by Kamran and Jocelyn. And Dr. Nouraie neglected to tell me. It was Moe Ghanoonparvar, when I mentioned that I was going to be translating this work that he said, you know it's been translated. And when I called Dr. Nouraie, I said look it's been translated, why didn't you tell me, Karman is my friend, I don't want to be in competition with Kamran. That would be the end of me as anything, as a translator, as an academic. She said, "No, no, it's all been cleared with the author. And we have clearance from every one. We just want to have a different point of view, a different approach, and we thought you might provide that." And that's basically all I have to say.

Farrokh admits to never looking at the previous translation during his process, to which Ghanoonparvar scoffs and says were he in Farrokh's place, "At the end of the process I would have gone through the first translation and I would have stolen from them. Those ideas that I said I really liked. You know, I would have stolen those from them. Because ultimately the work is more important than my ego" (Ghanoonparvar, *WwM* Symposium, panel 3). Still, once Farrokh knew a previous translation existed, he recognized the thin line he had to navigate, not mirroring the earlier work nor appearing to be intentionally undermining it. Unlike Talattof and Sharlet, Farrokh did have access to Parsipur, but he also chose to avoid contacting her until after he had completed his draft. She gave him minor notes, but just as she was pleased with the first version, she also enjoyed this new one. It was not until he was completely done with his translation that Farrokh looked at the first one. He says, "When I read the first translation afterwards, there were moments that I kicked myself for not having chosen certain words. And some points I was

pleased with myself for having done better than Kamran” (Farrokh, *WwM* Symposium, panel 3). He recognizes that just as much as there are bad and good choices, there are better ones too. Franklin Lewis adds a global dimension to the importance of reviewing and re-viewing previous translations as not merely an opportunity to hone one’s personal craft, but to improve the body of translated work at large, thus raising the global profile and hopefully encouraging more translations. He explains:

So the process of the translator is to make decisions the author didn’t have to make. And in a way the translator has to understand the book better than the author did. Because there are ambiguities. Inherent in any language and the author is not faced with resolving those ambiguities, the translator does. It’s not very frequent that one language maps the same ambiguities on another language. So the translator must make decisions which the author, and no one else, the reader doesn’t always have to make. Or at least they don’t have to make their decisions and print them on the page. They could make them and keep them in their head. So yeah, I think it’s helpful to look at the decisions that somebody else has made. And then to say, yeah, no I have a different vision of that. [...] It’s helpful to do that because I think we reach a collective sophistication in translation that maybe would make Persian literature in translation able to compete with maybe Israeli literature, and increasingly Arabic literature, and perhaps in a way that it doesn’t now. (Lewis, *WwM* Symposium, panel 3)

It is not surprising that these translators so readily shift into an idealized worldview where ideas can circulate so freely. By their very nature translators blur the hard lines separating the foreign and the familiar. Both Ghanoonparvar and Lewis excellently articulate the cosmopolitan agenda and responsibility tasked to the translator; Farrokh, Talattof, and Sharlet all respond in kind with their own distinctive heed to that call.

When completing their rendering, Talattof and Sharlet, as graduate students in an international studies program at Princeton University, were still new to the practice of translation. They were analyzing works of translation in their classes and came to their work with specific criteria they hoped to fulfill, not the least of which was learning a foreign language. Not

burdened with the influence of formal translation study, and with much more time to cultivate his craft, Farrokh developed his own style. He explains:

I try to be completely open minded when I decide to do a translation. That is especially happening right now because I'm in the process of translating a collection of short stories by different writers. And when I finish one short story, I set it aside and try not to think about it. I give myself a few days to kind of cleanse my mind of the influences of the other story. So that when I approach the next story it will be completely independent of the one before, in terms of influences the other story has had on my word choice, on my style choice, sentence structure. I try to allow the work to inspire me and to instruct me on how to proceed. And I'm sure that's true of almost everybody who translates.
(Farrokh, *WwM* Symposium, panel 3)

In addition to allowing the source text to guide his interpretation of the material, his attention to his audience contours his choices. Although he teaches writing, he never teaches his translations as course material. Nevertheless, his students are critical to his rhetorical agenda when translating. He explains:

I never teach the material that I've translated. It is true that I considered my students as case studies. When I looked at the students that they were representative of their culture and their linguistics of their environment. What it is that they need to be aware of as writers as well as thinkers, so what I chose to translate, I thought at some point, if these people read this, this deficiency, this shortcoming in their cultural background, in their literacy, will be a useful item I think. To that extent I keep my students in mind when I choose books to translate.

Farrokh's students represent the world as it is becoming around him. He tries to find in them lacunae that may be someday addressed if they encounter his translations. He thinks pragmatically about his translation process even if he does not want to put it in such explicit terms. Farrokh's panoramic perspective, informed by decades in the field, allows him to make tactful choices for a long-term betterment of his fellows.

Farrokh's own privileged background must be taken into account here, as it is a significant basis of his authorial license. He was translating from the time he was a teenager, playing with concepts from an early age, naturally driven rather than encouraged by academic

accolades. He was afforded an education in Iran that allowed him a near-native grasp of the English by shifting ideas, cultures, and codes since adolescence, followed by a long career as an academic teaching rhetoric and composition, fundamentally attending to audience and purpose in the construction of message. Although he says that he does not operate from any particular translation theory, his work nevertheless manifests distinct ethical, disciplinary, and practical allegiances.

The choices he makes reveal his own disposition. Whereas Talattof/Sharlet chose literality, Farrokh opted for a more eloquent interpretation by assuming a license to bend the original in ways the first one avoids. As shown by his insertion of footnotes, attributions, and supplementary text not found in the source, Farrokh aimed to convey meaning to an audience perceived as far less intimate with the source culture.⁴⁴

It is a balance that he tries to strike that sometimes wavers too far toward an opulent expression when a more quotidian one would have better served the implications of the original text. In his decision to do this, he makes certain stylistic choices that a literal translation could never express. A beautiful example of this occurs when he translates a particular Persian cultural affectation to show deference by referring to a single person in the plural. When Fa'iza first goes to visit Munis in the second chapter, "Fa'iza", she asks the housekeeper Alia, about Munis, she says:

"Ta ēn vaght khabēdē? Mashala naneh jan." [You're still sleeping at this time?
Good God woman.]
[...]
"Munis khanam hastand?" [Is madam Munis here?]
"Hastand." [They are.]
"Koja hastand?" [Where are they?] (22)

⁴⁴ Cf. 92ff.

The operative term here is “*hastand*”, which as it is being used asks if more than one person is home, despite the subject being the singular Munis. The repetition of this plural form in reference to Munis by the housekeeper and again by Fa’iza suggests clear class distinctions. When Fa’iza first talks to the housekeeper, they are close enough socially for her to be informal, but when she asks Alia about her employer, the tone shifts to the polite form, as in French one would shift from *tu* (informal) to *vous* (formal) for “you”. Talattof/Sharlet translate this literally:

Faizeh said, “You’re still sleeping? God.”
[...]
Faizeh asked, “Is Munis here?”
“Yes, she is.”
“Where is she?”

Farrokh’s translation often adds attributions to curtail confusion in the translation about who is speaking, and modifies the original with inferred sensibilities that he finds suggested in the source, though not clearly indicated. He does both in his translation of this passage:

“You were still asleep?” said Fa’iza accusingly. “My God!”
[...]
“Is Madam Munis home?” Fa’iza asked.
“Yes.”
“Where?”

Farrokh achieves this by suddenly shifting the register from casual to bombastic, signifying the Persian mechanism for expressing distance and a lack of familiarity. However, these could also be mistaken as occasions when he tends a bit too much toward grandiloquence in his phrasing. This is an incredibly subtle move on his part, and unfortunately it is totally lost unless somebody is familiar enough with the source culture to understand why the character’s voice so sharply changes.

In a subsequent chapter, when Munis returns from the dead and sees Fa’iza, she is taken aback by the formality in her friend’s demeanor. Parsipur writes:

Fa'iza goft:

“Al bateh beh vagheh nēk mē farmayad.

Cheshmha-ye-tan shabē-ye gorbeh shodeh. Valē soratetan beh sēreh asb mal farmodeh.”

Munis porsēd:

“Chera ketabē harf mē zanē? Ma ta hamēn chand hafteh pēsh dust budēm, har chand keh to fekr mē kardē man khar hastam valē beh har hal baham dust budēm. Mesl-e adam harf bezan.” (57)

[Fa'iza said:

“Of course you are saying something correct. Your eyes look like a cat. But your face resembles a horse.”

Munis asked:

“Why are you speaking to me in this bookish way? We were friends up till a few weeks ago, even though you thought I was a jackass, but still we were friends. Talk to me like a human being.”]

Here the operative terms are “*mē farmayad*”, which means “we are saying”; “*Cheshmha-ye-tan*”, which is the plural form of “your eyes”, as one would refer to the many pairs of eyes in a group of people; and “*soratetan*”, which, means “face”, and like “eyes” suggests a great many faces.

The singular subject of all this, however, is Munis.

Farrokh's translation:

“Of course,” Fa'iza said in agreement, ‘you are probative in your observation. Your eyes have feline contours and your face does tend to display equine features.”

“What kind of weird, bookish talk is that?” Munis protested vehemently. “We were friends until a few weeks ago, although you did think I was stupid. But we were still friends. Talk normally.” (42)

Talattof/Sharlet's translation:

“You are correct. Your eyes have become like a cat's. But your face has become like a horse's face.”

“Why are you talking so formally? Until just a few weeks ago we were friends although you thought I was an idiot. In any case, we were friends. Talk like a normal person.” (49)

The differences are only striking in light of the original. However, both risk losing the implications of the original in their translations, and neither can be blamed. In translating this bit of dialogue, there is no way for the translators to make the semantic shift of the original work in

their translations. As such, they have to resort to some other stylistic choices, as in the case of Farrokh who opts for a pompous rendering, or Talattof/Sharlet who simply ignore the implications entirely and translate the words literally. Still, there is misdirection in both of the translations that can confuse a non-Iranian reader. Both of the translations of Munis's quizzical response could imply that what is so off-putting to Munis about Fa'iza's speech is *what* she is saying, rather than *how* she is saying it.

A similar flattening inevitably occurs in the translation of idioms which function as cultural codes that can express everything from context to identity. Generally idioms are replaced with some comparable phrase, bringing the text closer to the reader. For efficiency, sometimes idioms are entirely left out, especially in the case of complex cultural expressions, and particularly insults.

Some idioms though offer curious fodder for thought if left as literal translations. A little further along in the "Fa'iza" chapter, Amir Khan, surprised to see Fa'iza, employs a common Persian idiom used when somebody has not seen a friend in some time, "*par sal dust, emsal ashna*" [last year friends, this year acquaintances] (23). Farrokh translates this to a comparable idiom in English, "Long time no see" (13). Talattof/Sharlet translate this as, "God, it's been ages." Both Talattof/Sharlet and Farrokh replace an idiom for an idiom. Certainly these all express the same thing, but the literal translation would likely invite a moment of wonder to the foreign reader just given the curious use of language and the novelty of this term.

The constant element in Farrokh's translation is his intention to facilitate understanding by a distinct classroom in the future that he sees in his mind. He knows what they read and how they think right now, as he has informed some of it. Much like Talattof and Sharlet, Farrokh

believes *Women without Men* has important lessons to impart; he is merely directing his version of the stories to a slightly different classroom.

Book [</>]= Movie?

Although Shirin Neshat and Shoja Azari, the directors of the film adaptation and collaborators on the screenplay, were not available to attend the *Women without Men* Symposium at UC Irvine, I was able to interview Neshat about the choices they made and processes involved in adapting the book for their movie. From the start, Neshat knew that her first feature film would not be an original screenplay. On the recommendation of her friend, Columbia University Professor of Comparative Literature Hamid Dabashi, she read Parsipur's novella. The visual effects of the text and Parsipur's imagination intrigued her. The madness suffered by these women and the vacillation between real and surreal struck Neshat as rich with potential for a film rendering.

Obviously a leap in media would necessitate a variety of interpretative decisions distinct from what the literary translators contended with; however, her insights regarding the challenges they faced working with the text, as first-time feature filmmakers, bear a conspicuous resemblance to the experiences of the literary translators. Where the literary translators sought equivalency in language, Neshat and Azari had the double challenge of language and image. In a personal interview I conducted with Neshat in the summer of 2014, she explains:

First of all it took us, God knows, three years to really look at this book and see how we could adapt it into a screenplay because it's really the most difficult book. And the fact that usually films have one or two protagonists and this one had five that were equally important. And with magical realism which, as every one knows, is the most difficult literature to turn into a movie. I have to tell you, my draw to the book is because first of all, if you know my own past work, it's always been somewhere in between politics and real, more mystical emotional, poetic material. And I saw that this book had that potential; of course, Shahrnush

has pointed out that it was the summer of 1952⁴⁵, but the thing is that, she even said at the time she couldn't think about expanding the political dimensions because she was living in Iran and it was very difficult. But we expanded that part. I just cannot tell you how lengthy the process of adapting the book to the script was. And how often people said this is an impossible task. And the most important thing is that magical realism is a kind of film people usually avoid because you either have to have a huge budget for special effects or you just go about it like the way we did. And people said that because we have no money that we should stay away from it because it's going to be really corny and things like that. So one of the decisions was how do we approach that level of magic that exists in Shahrnush's book, and that's one of the reasons we dropped Mahdokht. Because it's one thing to show men headless, but to show a woman constantly in a tree was going a little overboard. It's very difficult for the audience to keep going between reality and magic constantly in a two-hour film. They get really confused. It's a very difficult thing to expect people to go through, constantly back and forth from real characters to totally fictional ones, like magical characters. So a lot of the decisions we made were over years of discussion about the style of the film we wanted to make. And how much we wanted to stick to the original book. And how much we wanted to change. And there was a lot of important decisions to make. But in the end when we made the film, I think we really stuck to certain concepts, and we never came out of it. We were very faithful. Stylistically we were very consistent. And I think it worked. (Neshat, telephone interview)⁴⁶

For Neshat, the story allowed her the leverage to explore the mystical in harsh confrontation with political turmoil. Her vision of what the film would be was distinct from, but inspired by the book.

After years of analyzing, together with Shahrnush, together with Shoja, and script consultants from all over Europe, I think the solution came to create a story that borrows what works best for us from the book, but let go of what didn't work for us, in terms of making it into a film, but also my style. I could write a book about making this film. In the end, if I could say how faithful the film is to the book, I would say 60%. It just takes points of her story and exaggerates them in a way, and gets rid of a lot of things. And when you hear Shahrnush talk about the film she says this is really not her book.

For Parsipur, the film is Neshat's impression of her book. Although the characters were directly based on those in the novella, Neshat re-imagined the context to materialize her vision of the

⁴⁵ She corrects herself later in the interview, as the story, in fact, is set in 1953.

⁴⁶ All quotes from Neshat and Madoff in this section cited as "telephone interview" were conducted and transcribed by me in the summer of 2014.

narrative. Much of Neshat's work prior to this feature film included videos, several of which were inspired by Parsipur's works. Although she cut the character of Mahdokht from the feature adaptation, she had previously made a short film about her. With the feature, though, she took broader liberties in layering Parsipur's original landscape with a far richer allegorical resonance.

Neshat says:

This book has that perfect balance between being a story that could very ephemeral, very mystical, very poetic; how could I say, the garden, the orchard represented all of the symbolism, all of the metaphors that were there. And once you were in the orchard you could really be exploring all of the subjects that had nothing to do with politics or history. Then when you were outside you could really bring to the fore all of the political history and the culture. And of course we talked in depth with Shahrnush because she didn't even really try to make the orchard that magical, you know; to her everything was kind of ordinary. We made the whole story much more conceptual. Exaggerating the orchard as this heavenly mystical space and the city of Tehran as this eventful reality. We took that surrealism that she started and in order to make it a comprehensible film we exaggerated the realistic versus the nonrealistic.

Neshat saw an opportunity in the richness of the characters and the simplicity of the narrative to interpolate her own political agenda. Like Talattof, she recognized in the book a chance to advance a variety of fronts through the characters and the narrative. The women in her adaptation carry both a feminist and nationalist symbolism. The politics that underpin the landscape of her film contour these metaphors in a way that is totally absent from the original book. She explains:

The whole conceptual arch was that [while] these women who were looking for freedom, democracy, and independence, the country of Iran was equally looking for an idea of freedom, democracy, and independence from the foreigners. So for me, it had this kind of conceptual connection, the women and the country. Almost like the country being the fifth female character. So there's a lot of intentions that were added, so I took what I loved the best and dropped what I didn't like.

Indubitably this marks the divide between a translation and an adaptation that exceeds simply the alterations demanded by a shift in medium. Nevertheless, it is because of these changes that her agenda is most clearly represented.

Her intention to inject a political allegory into her adaptation results in her making both overt and subtle changes to the narrative. All inquiry about Neshat's political charge ought to be dispelled repeatedly through the film, but any lingering doubts are trounced by her dedication at the end of the film just before the credit roll: "This film is dedicated to the memory of those who lost their lives in the struggle for freedom and democracy in Iran from the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 to the Green Movement of 2009" (Neshat *Women without Men* 2009). Likewise, her treatment of the narrative and characters vacillates between delicate and heavy-handed. While the outright deletion of a character is a stark change, some of the metaphors that she explores, especially in contrasting the reality of city to the mysticism of the orchard are far more understated. Neshat plays with this balance between harsh and soft interpretation, as much as she explores the limits of the real and surreal. She explains:

And that road that travelled between the city and the orchard. If you remember the women always travelled this little road. That became the bridge. Every woman came on this one road to the orchard. And to me that became very conceptual. But that road was the only connection between the reality and the surrealism, the magic, and also, when the army at the end travels on that road and enters the orchard as a rape. All of these intentions were really thought of. That we kept the stories very separate, what was happening in the city of Tehran and what was happening in the orchard with the women, but at some point they were interconnected. When the army enters the orchard, the magic was lifted. It was like a rape. And then things began to fall apart. And I think in many ways that is very Iranian in the sense that in our literature, for example, if you look at the allegory of the garden or the orchard, repetitively referred to in the poetry, or in mystical literature as the place that is sacred, that is a place of transcendence, that it's a place where you can leave the banality of everyday life. And yet we have all this political stuff that is more about modern history, very, very dark political reality. So for me, in a way the orchard represents a very ancient, or maybe timeless situation that still refers to Iran, but in a more allegorical way. But then Tehran, and whatever political realities are happening, it refers to today's Iran. (Neshat, telephone interview)

The range and flexibility of her medium allowed Neshat to broaden the scope of the text to evoke complex symbols that are sometimes limited when the story is experienced solely as a book. Her

work further benefits from being an adaptation made decades after the original. She can make comments about politics with a freedom and clarity of hindsight unavailable to Parsipur and thus nonexistent for the literary translators to carry over. What Farrokh vaguely introduces with his footnotes, Neshat can paint in graphic detail.

Well before she decided to make a movie out of a novella, Neshat had been experimenting with the interplay of literature and imagery. Neshat's previous work naturally synergized her vision and Parsipur's writings. It is an intersection of media that has long prevailed in her work. She says:

Actually when I look back on my own work, like film I made *Touba*, which is also inspired by Shahrnush, it's about the tree of Touba, which is feminine and there's a woman inside of a tree. And she represents the sacred tree, which is actually from the Koran. It's the tree in paradise. Again and again, I'm always caught between symbols and metaphors that are in one way going back to very ancient and literal history of Iran, and iconography that really, directly making reference to the political history of Iran that is very contemporary.

So don't forget, I use a lot of poetry. I made work that uses Rumi poetry to Ferdowsi's, and my images are of activists and people that really are today's Iran. So my work has always been navigating between the past and the present of Iran and whatever the identity of that culture is. Which to me is mysticism and very dark politics.

If I look at *Women without Men*, I think it's really a very Persian expression about what we really are about: obsession with poetic space, spiritual and mystical space, which is the orchard. And yet, whatever has happened to us since 1953. Which is a totally different place. And I find that no matter what I do, whether it's a photograph or a video, it's always about that kind of dynamic about the past and the present, timeless and very timefulness. And Shahrnush's book had that kind of potential. That you could tell a story about a particular time in history, yet, you could be in the orchard and be talking about something completely removed from any particular place or time. And I loved that.

Perhaps a neophyte to feature filmmaking when she first began the years-long task of producing her movie, Neshat had been learning aspects of the process and this film was culmination of that development. She spent years toiling and learning the craft through experimentation with shorter,

more stylized adaptations of Parsipur's work, until she felt prepared to tackle a more formidable project.

Neshat feels that her movie was not entirely successful in the end. Interestingly, she points to two of the critical and emotion laden decisions every translator contends with as her biggest challenges: choice of material and inexperience with the medium. She says:

[T]hat book is impossible to turn into a perfect screenplay. I think also, for a first time film to work out the balance between magic and realism, politics and mysticism, artistic film versus a commercial film, you know, a very culturally specific film to a very international, universally told story. All of these balances were very ambitious to navigate. We set a very ambitious goal. And to begin with a very difficult book.

Even though she had previously made several short films about subjects drawn from Parsipur's work, in attempting to make a linear, feature-length film she exceeded what she felt were the limits of her grasp of the format and the material. She was still learning how to make narrative movies, which as she already explained is far different in kind and scope than the films she had made previously. The choice of material further strained the learning process as it refused to readily lend itself to a filmic adaptation. Nevertheless, she persevered through the process and although she feels her work is lacking, the numerous accolades and international awards it received suggest otherwise.

Apparently, like so many translators, Neshat is not immune to the anxiety of how they could have rendered their work better. She says, "You know they always say that whenever anybody has read a book and seen the movie, they always prefer the book." As Bellos pointed out earlier, if the comparison between the translations can be absurd, then the comparison between a film adaptation and the original book even more clearly manifests a paltry understanding of both media.⁴⁷ John Ciardi writes in his translator's note for Dante's *Inferno*,

⁴⁷ Cf. footnote (37) on 118.

“When the violin repeats what the piano has played, it cannot make the same sounds and it can only approximate the same chords. It can, however, make recognizably the same ‘music,’ the same air” (ix). He explains that for him “transposition” is preferable to “translation,” as “‘translation,’ implies a series of word-for word equivalents that do not exist across language boundaries any more than piano sounds exist in the violin” (ix). In adapting Ciardi’s terminology, the “transposition” of the text, especially across media, becomes a creative experience as much as it is an academic one. The decision to change the comparison to Farrokhlagha from Vivien Leigh to Ava Gardner because of the similarity to the actress is far from some perversion of the source material, but simply a practical constraint of the filmmaking process. Neshat explains what happened:

The actress looked more like Ava Gardner. It was like that. It was really funny. We were discussing this with Shoja and at some point we looked at her and we said that there’s no way he could say you look Vivien Leigh. It was more like trying to connect it to the actress and how she was desiring to be a great movie star. And there’s no way she could look like Vivien Leigh. (Neshat, telephone interview)

These are the basic facts of interpreting any text, whether between media or languages; the changes are not inherently losses, but cascading consequences inevitable in the course of completing a grand project. Much of the translator’s creativity flows from making **do** with available resources. As the translator, or in this case, filmmaker, gains more experience and expertise by doing more translations/adaptations, a wider range of options appear on her horizon.

Neshat could not have been blind to the challenges she would endure in rendering the text as a film before settling upon Parsipur’s work, but she explains that beyond the story and style, a large part of the attraction was Parsipur’s pedagogical influence on her as a person. She says:

One of the reasons I wanted to make this film was because of who Shahrnush was as a person. A large part of the draw for me was she herself. And unfortunately

her difficult life has not stopped.⁴⁸ Very few Iranian writers have been translated and had their work made into a film. I don't know why some people have to suffer so much. She's so special and she's strong at the same time. Every time I'm around her, she just teaches me so much. Her rituals are just amazing. She's not bitter, even with all of the things that have happened to her. She's really trying to survive.

So much of the inspiration for Neshat was bringing Shahrnush herself to a mainstream understanding. She recognizes the value of what was imparted to her by the author, and feels both indebted and responsible as an artist in the world to extol that insight to her audience.

For her debut feature film, Neshat chose a text because of its narrative value, as well as her esteem for its author. Her choice, although an often-vexing one, captivated the neophyte to persevere and hone her skills to authentically deliver her expression of something that enlightened her. Throughout the process, she and her partner, Azari, returned to conversations with Parsipur to understand the interiority of the text and the landscape of the narrative through her eyes. Then they interpreted it through their experiences and intentions to create a work that draws from a wide gamut of minds.

In an interesting repetition of the method behind the initial literary translation of *Women without Men* into English by Talattof/Sharlet, the subtitles of the film were also collaboratively constructed. Neshat and Azari recognized that they needed to bring in somebody with a more intimate connection with their Western audience than they ever could achieve as Iranian born and raised filmmakers. Although Neshat and Azari crafted the screenplay over several years, when it came to subtitling the film, they worked with Steven Henry Madoff, a graduate of Columbia (BA) and Stanford (MA) who has written for various publications from *Art Forum* to

⁴⁸ To be clear, Neshat here is saddened by the hardships that Parsipur has and still continues to endure in her life. Parsipur's ability to push through these challenges is much of the inspiration for the Neshat.

the *New York Times*, and now chairs the MA Curatorial Practice Department at New York's School of Visual Arts.⁴⁹

Madoff commands a consummate grasp of the English language, in particular pairing with visual arts. Moreover, he is a poet, which a film such as this absolutely demands for delivering the nuanced narrative delicately, yet effectively. Madoff was brought in to both smooth over foreignized parts of the dialogue, as well as to complement it with figurative beacons for easier navigation by moviegoers not necessarily well-versed in either Iranian culture or surrealist cinema.⁵⁰

In August 2014, I was able to interview Madoff about his experience working with Neshat and Azari on this film. His insights were enlightening and offered remarkable revelations about the complex and layered process behind the production. Although he is credited as having done the subtitles, as well as writing the “voiceover text/additional dialogue” in the film's credit roll, he was, in fact, a far more integral element to the final product. He explains:

I didn't do just the subtitles. I wrote all of the voiceovers. Originally Shirin had asked if I'd look at the rough cut of the film to advise her because she was in a quandary at that point about the direction for it. And I gave her very specific frame-by-frame suggestions about what I thought wasn't working in the narrative of the film. And I said that I thought it needed a voiceover to kind of tie the movie together. And she then hired an Australian to do that, I don't remember his name. I met with the producers and I met with that screenwriter, and he was given the assignment. And he wrote voiceovers that were not very good, according to Shirin. I don't know that I ever saw them. And she said, well these were your ideas, why don't you try it. So I wrote the voiceovers and then I thought that the subtitles were not in good English. I think that Shoja had translated them himself and obviously it's not his first language. And so I said, why don't I just correct these. And I did that. It felt to me that there were many points in the script that just didn't work. So I started rewriting the script. From the subtitles and Shirin and Shoja then brought actors and actresses back to a sound stage in Paris because whenever the camera is not on the actor's mouth, on the face, then you can re-shoot, or I should say, you can dub new words. I ended up revising a lot of the

⁴⁹ From MIT Press author page and *Arts and Education* announcement.

⁵⁰ For Neshat's explanation of the process behind the subtitling and voiceovers, cf. footnotes (³⁴) and (³⁵) on 109.

script in that way. Then obviously that was part and parcel with the subtitles.
(Madoff, telephone interview)

Although Neshat and Azari had already been working on the film for five years before they brought Madoff in, they recognized the value of his suggestions and over the course of a year in post-production, reworked the film around many of the specific directions he gave them. Initially he was brought in “as a friend, as an art critic, just as a writer to look at it,” he says. Asked about the proportion of his involvement, he states:

I don't really remember scene-by-scene, there were just many points when I didn't feel that it worked. It didn't feel natural, or didn't logically make sense. So I just took upon myself to rewrite it. And as I say, they along with the producers, looked at what I'd written and would decide what they wanted to have the actors come back and do. And then, of course, as I say, all of the voiceovers and the idea of the kind of voice of the voiceovers was mine. Shoja didn't have anything to do with that, nor Shirin. I didn't rewrite it, I just wrote it. In fact, she asked me to write more and more and more of them. I think I wrote sixteen different moments and then we were all saying this is crazy. This is too much. So then we cut it back to six moments, five, six moments.

It stands to reason that a person so centrally involved with the adaptation of an Iranian novella, of an Iranian narrative, originally written in Persian, and being made into a film entirely in Persian, by an Iranian filmmaking team, would have to be somehow an authority of Iranian arts and letters. Madoff is not remotely that. In fact, he has never read either translation of Parsipur's book, and certainly not the Persian. His expertise and value to the filmmakers was in his ability to filter the deep Iranianness of the story through the American/English speaking conduit of his being to create something that elegantly spoke to an international audience. He explains:

I never read the book. I still haven't read the book. [...] Obviously, what I did was historical research because I didn't know anything about the period. I had to understand the black shirts and just the history of that moment. So I did that in order to rewrite the radio broadcasts. I'm a writer. I just wrote what I felt as appropriate. I had listened to the actresses and the actors. I'd read the version of the screenplay at that point in tact. And I just kept watching it and thinking about it. But it's also just the emotional tenor. So when you're listening to a voice of someone speaking lines, there is an affect to that. So when you're revising that as

a writer, you're trying to imitate and encourage that voice, that actor's voice. And that's really what I was doing. Because as I say, I didn't see the point in reading the novel. If we were at the beginning of that process and I was the scriptwriter, then, yes, of course. But it was way, way, way past that point.

Madoff refers to his work on the film as "poetic tweaking." There was already so much there, but it needed a certain structure and sensibility to carry across its essence. His job was to use language to bring such order to the images.

Still, it would seem that as the person credited with the subtitles, he would on some level recognize his work as a translation; yet, Madoff does not see it that way. He says, "This isn't a translation project for me. When I was brought in it was way past the point of translation. I felt completely free to do whatever I wanted to make the film work. I didn't care what the previous versions were. I just needed to weave it together so that voice was kept true but it moved the story along in a better way." He felt no responsibility or loyalty to original material. His source material was Neshat's film and he was merely hired to connect the parts that were not working. For Madoff, there was no interpretation of *Parsipur*, so much as of Neshat. If he was translating anything it would have been Neshat's screenplay and images into subtitles that explained them more clearly and consistently. However, even more interesting is how much his writing then changed the development of the narrative in post-production. The first and last words of the film are voiceovers written by Madoff. Throughout the film, the context is consistently delivered from radio broadcasts that he wrote. For any audience other than one who speaks Persian, their singular entry point into the dialogue was delivered by Madoff. Although, he shies away from considering his work on this project a translation, I contend that he was absolutely translating, just not *Parsipur*.

Perhaps because Madoff is not a translator, he fails to realize the broader implications of what is translation. His work was essentially on one level an act of domesticating the text that

was likely clunky and still smacking of Azari's foreign upbringing. In Madoff's "cleaning up" of the subtitles, he was more than editing language; he was redefining the terms with which a non-Persian speaking audience would experience the images. Moreover, that the filmmakers actually changed their film to better adhere to his subtitles is all the more remarkable, because in doing that, they were translating their images to connect to his subtitles, as well as redubbing the spoken dialogue to adhere to the subtitles he had written. The subtitling in this movie, at times, became the driving force in the unfolding of both the film's production and storyline. What is usually the most pedantic and utilitarian feature of a foreign film, the subtitles – often shoddily slapped together well after the film has been completed – in this rare case, was granted the authority to guide the narrative rather than merely serve it.

Looking back at the quote from the film's opening sequence where the character Munis says in a voiceover: "*Hala faghat sukut bud. Sukut va dēg-e hēchē,*" which translates to "Now there was only silence. Silence and nothing else"; and the subtitles read as, "Now I'll have silence. Silence and nothing" – suddenly this seeming problem with the subtitles actually is a flaw in the translation back to Persian. This voiceover was written by Madoff, in English, as were the subtitles that go with the words. They were translated into Persian by Azari and Neshat for the actress to speak several years after the sequence was in the can. The melding of minds and the swirling of influences in just this scene alone is emblematic of the meticulous process behind this film's production.

Much as Sharlet helped Talattof speak to an audience that he struggled to elegantly reach, Madoff was able to summon a native understanding of an English speaking society to soften the delivery of the foreign for them. Although he did not straddle Iranian and American cultures as Sharlet did, his expertise was split between two alternate spheres required to interpret this film:

surreal visual art and English. Madoff, like Sharlet, was a critical component for a masterful rendering of this story.

With both the first translation of the book, as well as the film adaptation, a case can be made that the translators and filmmakers were neophytes that somehow created authoritative interpretations. However, that would be a naïve misreading of the process and the driving aim of neophyte translation. The pedagogical process is where neophyte translation occurs. During that process, the neophyte can develop expertise through dedication and study. Talattof was new to translating, but not to Iranian or American culture, languages, practices, ideas, or beliefs. During the process of collaborating and intersecting their knowledge, he and Sharlet matured; and eventually, after considerable work and revision, an authoritative and quality translation was produced. The final text is itself not the neophyte translation, so much as the end product of a process that cultivated expertise in scholars new to this experience.

For decades, Neshat had been making video installations featured in museums and exhibits around the world. She is an internationally celebrated artist who had never made a feature film before. After years of toiling on their own, Neshat and Azari, with Parsipur, Madoff, and countless others, produced a film adaption of the book that was the culmination of a neophyte's journey toward mastery.

The process of developing authoritative command of source/target language/culture is where neophyte translation unfolds. The result, if earnestly pursued, could be expertise and authority, at which point the translator is no longer a neophyte. Still, even if it is not earnestly or conclusively pursued, there is extreme value in the mere confrontation of the foreign as a means to expand a cosmopolitan worldview. Although the works produced are unlikely to be published or circulated, as pedagogical exercises, thought experiments, and/or language-learning activities,

the deep investment demanded by the very act of translation offers potent intellectual and cultural rewards for someone newly engaging in the process.

The Hermeneutics of Translation

Any book is, in and of itself, instructive. When we read, we receive knowledge previously not necessarily there. However, a translation is a unique kind of reading experience that is so much more complicated than a book written in one's native language. The translation demands two specific things from the reader that a non-translated text does not. The readers must trust the translator and they must be willing to accept and work through inevitable cultural confusions and questionable choices. The translation offers a unique transmission of knowledge that often is unknown to a foreign audience, and typically inaccessible otherwise. The mediation of the material forces a palimpsestic reception of the original ideas that can never be bypassed. A translation is no longer the work of the original author, nor a novel creation by the translator – it brings the two together in a rhetorically strategized amalgam that limits the input of either influence based on the target audience.

Translation occurs at the intersection of hermeneutics and rhetoric. Mailloux adroitly outlines how these specific traditions “address very practical tasks.” He writes:

Rhetorical theory is to rhetorical practice as hermeneutics is to interpretation. As practices, rhetoric and interpretation denote both productive and receptive activities. That is, interpretation refers to the presentation of text in a speech—as in oral performance—and the understanding or exegesis of a written text; similarly, rhetoric refers to the production of persuasive discourse and the analysis of a text's effects on an audience. In some ways rhetoric and interpretation are practical forms of the same extended human activity: Rhetoric is based on interpretation; interpretation is communicated through rhetoric. Furthermore, as reflections on practice, hermeneutics and rhetorical theory are mutually defining fields: hermeneutics is the rhetoric of establishing meaning, and rhetoric the hermeneutics of problematic linguistic situations. When we ask about the meaning of a text, we receive an interpretive argument; when we seek the means

of persuasion, we interpret the situations. As theoretical practices, hermeneutics involves placing a text in a meaningful context, while rhetoric requires the contextualization of a text's effects. (*Reception Histories* 4)

If hermeneutics defines the principles of our interpretation, then rhetoric is the activation.

Together these inform the translator's practice, as well as complicate and contour the reader's experience.

Close reading is excellent for deriving sympathy with the text, but a translation demands the translator develop an empathetic connection with the material. Language learning is often best done through immersion, because the individual's every sensory perception is overwhelmed with new codes, so one learns or becomes attuned to the music of a new culture. When that process is advanced and a literary translation is constructed, the translator now consumes the language so she can meld with it and express ideas from a source culture to another one. The translator assumes authority over the materials to render something consistent. Obviously, the intentionality of the author is inaccessible, so the translator erects a set of guiding principles, aims, target audiences, or whatever, to orient the translation. No longer just feeling with the original language and culture, but having cultivated a one-ness with it, the translator creates something new locally with foreign materials. It is important to note that the translator does not empathize with the author, but solely the source text, that is, the author's work.

This brings about the terrible paradox of the hermeneutics of translation. Every translation is an interpretive act that uses a strict set of hermeneutic principles to guide the interpretation, in the broadest sense, from one language to another, and then more exactly, through any of the myriad rhetorical choices embedded in the work – translations are by definition hermeneutic enterprises. However, when it comes to reception, the hermeneutics that guide the construction of the translation, and moreover the context of the source material, are all

layered with so many subjective interventions that translations almost always defy a hermeneutic application for comprehending the text within either its source paradigm or even that of the translator. Gadamer illustrates this challenge by analogizing conversation to translation:

Every conversation obviously presupposes that the two speakers speak the same language. Only when two people can make themselves understood through language by talking together can the problem of understanding and agreement even be raised. Having to depend on an interpreter's translation is an extreme case that doubles the hermeneutical process, namely the conversation: there is one conversation between the interpreter and the other and a second between the interpreter and oneself. (387)

A translation is dislodged from original context, culture, and language, and then it is filtered through the translator's subjectivity before arriving at the new audience. Depending on how far removed from the source, the capacity for the target audience to accurately apply the hermeneutic principles employed in the construction of the source or even the translation is challenged, if not entirely thwarted. Should the translator choose to bring the text closer to the reader, smoothing out incongruities between the two cultures, then the hermeneutics operating in the source are obfuscated, perhaps even dissolved if the translator assumes too much license in his interpretation. If the translator instead moves the reader closer to the original, producing a more literal translation that includes but does not mediate strange idioms and foreign concepts, then the hermeneutics driving the translation likely will be difficult to distinguish. The hermeneutics involved in the construction of the text thus appear to always defy the grasp of the target audience seeking to comprehend it.

The empathy potentially available in translating and the complex hermeneutic demands translation puts on the audience are the two particular traits that allow translation construction and consumption to serve such a unique pedagogical function. It is one that unfortunately is not exercised enough, and when it is, often the circulation of information flows too much in one

direction, from dominant cultures to marginalized, from the West to the East, and in this particular case, from America to Iran.

Translation Choices, Concessions, and Creativity

Despite the insight a consistent interpretive scheme would offer the producers and consumers of translations, the fact remains that translators are contextually bound and driven. Translators may earnestly believe that they are adhering to some particular hermeneutics, but there are various gaps that beget analysis. In the case of *Women without Men*, these breaches reveal how the very hermeneutics that seem to be driving the works, also problematize the reader's comparative analysis. Sometimes the translations depart from the original, perhaps in the same way, other times uniquely. There are also occasions when the translators, Farrokh much more than Talattof/Sharlet, appropriate a command over the text and impose marked changes.

For the most part, Farrokh tends to supplement the text to fill in potentially confusing cultural idiosyncrasies, sometimes changing a proper name to a common noun, as he does in the beginning of "Zarrinkolah" (Chapter 7), changing the original "*shahr-e no*" [New City] to "the city's notorious red-light district" (61). Other times he will add a descriptor when merely the proper name is given, as when Fa'iza gets into the cab and says the street name in the original, "*Sezavar*", Farrokh adds "Street" to make it clear what this strange word means (12). In both cases Talattof/Sharlet adhere exactly to the source.

Some of the choices made by the translators accommodate for the compromises of space and time specific to each culture. When Fa'iza is discussing her trip to purchase goods for her big banquet, in the original Parsipur only gives the proper name of the butcher, which to an Iranian would be clearly recognized as a person's name. Talattof/Sharlet leave the name of the

butcher in hopes that the context will make it clear that this strange term in the middle of the sentence will be recognized not just as a name, but that of the butcher: “I went to Mirkhavand’s and tipped him and bought eight pieces of filet mignon, one per person. (23). Farrokh though deletes the name entirely and offers the function: “I went to the meat market and tipped the butcher five tomans for eight prime-cut filets” (19). He does not believe that his audience will necessarily know that “*Mirkhavand*” is a person’s name, or that the time it would take them to process this would somehow jeopardize the flow of the text. Farrokh changes the depth of the grave Fa’iza and Amir Khan dig for Munis after he kills her from one meter in the original to “three feet” in his translation (33) – Farrokh’s American readers will be able to understand the relative shallowness of that grave if it is presented in standard rather than metric terms. Talattof/Sharlet leave out this detail entirely from theirs. When Parsipur writes “*tar zan*” [somebody who plays the tar, a stringed Caucus region musical instrument] (76), Farrokh changes this to “musician” (63), and Talattof/Sharlet find as close to a literal translation in “guitar player” (73). These are the sorts of changes Farrokh commonly makes to simplify the reading experience for his audience, which Talattof/Sharlet also occasionally incorporate, as when both of the translations change the Kind Gardener’s original statement that he has a “*dast-e tala*” [golden hand] to the corresponding “green thumb” (SP 109) (TS 101) (FF 87).

In light of the importance of nomenclature and the authority of naming that is rife throughout this narrative, both of the translations take some notable liberties, Farrokh more so than Talattof/Sharlet, but they too sometimes are forced to concede literality for sense.⁵¹ During one of Fa’iza’s tirades she refers in the original to “*Hazrat-e Azreal*” [In Islam, the Archangel of Death, comparable to the grim reaper] (31). Both of the translations change this to “Angel of

⁵¹ On the importance of naming in *Women without Men*, cf. 41, 42, 48f., 50, 51ff., 100f., 104f, 176f.

Death” as a proper name in the Farrokh, and merely as a general term in the Talattof/Sharlet, “angel of death” (FF 21) (TS 25). When Amir Khan opens the door and finds Fa’iza there just after he stabbed his sister, in the original he blurts, “*Ya hazrat-e Abbas*” [Oh Honorable Abbas, refers to the son of the Imam Ali who was martyred in the Battle of Karbala. It is a common exclamation similar to “Dear God” or “Holy Cow”] (25). So it is curious that neither translation attempts to bring this extremely Iranian affect to their audience, as Talattof/Sharlet translate it to “Good God!” (36); and even though it would have been an excellent opportunity to add another footnote, Farrokh translates it to “Oh my goodness!” (31).

Sometimes within a single paragraph the translators will vacillate between literality and meaning delivery in their treatment of idioms. Parsipur writes at the end of “Fa’iza” (Chapter 2):

Fa’iza javab nadadeh bud. Bass kardan ba Amir Khan sarf nadasht. Bayad mē gozasht mēveh khodesh beresad. Hala dēgar khēalesh az jenab parvēn rahat shodeh bud. Zan dēgar nemē tavanast gel ghat-e ab konad [Fa’iza did not respond. There was no benefit in arguing with Amir Khan. She had to let the fruit ripen on its own. Now that she was no longer concerned with Parveen. That woman could no longer muddy the waters] (33-34).

There are two idioms that Parsipur employs here. The first, “let the fruit ripen on its own”, implies allowing something to come to fruition at its own pace; and the second, “no longer muddy the waters”, suggests intrusion, infection, and/or imposition. Farrokh translates this as: “Fa’iza made no response. It was no use arguing with Amir Khan. Better wait for time to do its work. Now that she’d put the matter with Parveen to rest, the woman could no longer muddy the waters” (23). Upon first inspection we could say that Farrokh does not merely stick to a set of fixed rules about how he wants to render his text; that his attention to the overall consistency of meaning is the driving force; and the method by which he determines whether to focus on literality or meaning returns to his speculations about the capacities and needs of his students. In this keen hermeneutic reflection on Farrokh, we can begin to discern shades of his understanding

of his students. The limits of their willingness to struggle with irregularities according to the logic and culture of their American society begin to take shape, especially when we can examine in this condensed section Farrokh's opposing decisions insofar as to what he ought to do with these two turns of phrase.

Then why did Talattof/Sharlet make the exact opposite choice? "Faizeh didn't answer. There was no point in debating with Amir. Fruit ripens by itself. / She was no longer worried about Parvin. There was nothing left for the woman to do to her" (28).⁵² They literally translate the first idiom, but interpret the second. Does this mean that our analysis of Farrokh's interpretation lacks a clearly defined theoretical drive, because we know that Talattof/Sharlet favor literality almost always? Why did they break from pattern here? How is their audience so diametrically opposed to Farrokh's in this moment? They also drop the Khan from Amir's name? What can all of this mean?

Idioms always involve complicated contortions, as when later in the same chapter, Fa'iza wants to speak her mind to Amir Khan, and the original says that she "*Del be darya zad*" [Hits the ocean with her heart] (48). Talattof/Sharlet replace this Iranian idiom for a common American one, "threw caution to the wind" (40). Farrokh though does not see the point in bothering with it, and writes, "Felt confident enough" (35). He shifts around the dialogue in this sequence and even adds a line that does not appear in the original in the previous paragraph, seemingly to support the implied tone of the scene. He regularly adds not just attributions to dialogue sequences, but will describe certain tonal elements perhaps evoked in the original

⁵² It bears noting that Talattof/Sharlet break the paragraph after the first idiom, as I have indicated with the slash (/) in my quote. In the original, the three sentences run together in a single paragraph. Farrokh maintains this style. Talattof/Sharlet's choice to break this paragraph poignantly offsets the meaning of the original as it disrupts the comparison being drawn between Amir and Parveen by Fa'iza whose internal monologue we are in this moment reading.

diction, that would not be carried over clearly. The following are some examples (the bolded verbiage is added by Farrokh):

“It’s outstanding,” **she would concur** (2);
The girl yelps like a dog, **she thought**.
“Get away from me, you filth,” **Madokht snapped**.
“Oh no, please madam,” **pleaded the girl** (7);
“That is exactly what I was trying to prove. So I gave another dinner party,”
Fa’iza said with a touch of self-satisfaction (19);
““We were just have a girl talk,” said Fa’iza, **trying to lighten the mood** (23);
““Exactly!” said Amir Khan, **with the force of an epiphany** (35);
“What are we going to do now?” Asked Fa’iza, **trying to change the subject**
(43);
“What do you mean by that, madam?” **Ostovary exclaimed with unaccustomed sharpness** (76);
“Do you happen to know Mr. Atrchian?” asked Amir Khan, **brimming with anticipation** (98)

These additional explanations are clearly something he chooses to insert fairly consistently throughout his translation.

A more pronounced example of Farrokh’s tendency to fill in the gaps is when Fakhroddin, Farrokhlaqa’s lover is being mocked by her husband. In the original, Parsipur refers to one of the souvenirs Fakhroddin has brought back with him from America as “*kola-ye maskhareh-e*” [absurd hat] (67). Although Talattof/Sharlet translate this to “Goofy hat” (60), Farrokh appends his own vision of what this hat looked like, a “ridiculous American-Indian feathered warbonnet” (52). Again at the end of the book, Farrokh decides to make a huge departure from the source in translating the flower that Zarrinkolah births as “morning glory” (113); when in fact Parsipur wrote “*nelufar*” [lily] (139), which is how Talattof/Sharlet also translate it (131).

Another enigmatic move away from the source text occurs when both Talattof/Sharlet and Farrokh change Parsipur’s original metaphor about Munis moving through the world at the speed of a “*lak posht*” [turtle] (107) into a “snail” in their renderings (TS 99) (FF 86). Could we

wonder, when the translation is so far from the original in a critical detail that is not prone to interpretation, whether the translator is interceding to bring the reader's attention toward something in particular? What is so challenging about this is that the reader will have to be able to discern that something has shifted solely by what the translation offers. In these cases, the reader would never know that it was originally a lily or a turtle, but for some reason Farrokh made it a morning glory and both translations opted for snail. Could morning glory have a deeper cultural resonance to his audience than lily? Does a morning glory represent metaphorically to Americans what lilies are to Iranians? Does a turtle's shell suggest greater security than a snail's? Are there simply not enough turtles in the American psyche for the metaphor to be effective? These questions could go on forever and remain unanswered. Meanwhile, we have to wonder, could it have been a mistake?

In "Zarrinkolah" (Chapter 7), she says that her problems started one Saturday morning when she stopped seeing heads on men. However, Talattof/Sharlet changed Saturday to Sunday in their translation. Surely, we can overlook oversights when shifting calendars and dates before Google allowed us to make such changes instantly.⁵³ This, though, must be a deliberate change, as they use Saturday twice on the same page in two different sentences, in two different paragraphs. Nevertheless, why they made this interpretive decision is unclear, or was it not interpretation so much as mere error?

Some choices are not as difficult to distinguish as being interpretations or blunders. When Farrokhlaqa is first being given a tour of her orchard by the real estate agent and discovers Mahdokht, Mr. Ostovary goes on a diatribe about the shame this girl has brought to her family and concerns about their reputation, especially their family name. He explains how they will now be

⁵³ Cf. 97-99.

mocked because of this girl's seeming insanity. The derisive names Parsipur writes in her original are "*Derakht-chian* [...] *derkaht-zadeh* [...] *derakht-pur*" (95). "*Derakht*" means "tree", followed by common Iranian surname suffixes. Both translations offer only two variations as opposed to the three in the original. Farrokh writes: "Arbormans [...] Arborson" (76). Talattof/Sharlet write: "Treemans [...] Treasons" (88). The more accurate translation is the Talattof/Sharlet translation; however, Farrokh's translation seems more like a real last name. And perhaps that is part of the subtle irony of this moment in the original; the attempted absurdity of the name Parsipur writes is either aggrandized or flattened, depending on how you see it, by the very commonness of the names. *Derakhtchian* and *Derakhtzadeh* are not ridiculously made-up names that anybody would ever realistically use to shame somebody else, much in the same way as "Arborman". Whereas "Treasons", perhaps by bearing such a similarity to "treason", does sound a little more off-putting and made-up.⁵⁴ The effect though is negligible unless the original is known.

In "Two Women on the Road" (Chapter 8), depending on which translation is being read, either the central figure of the "Kind Gardener" or "Good Gardener" is introduced. What is the interpretative difference in modifying the gardener character with "good" as opposed to "kind"? In the original, Parsipur's term is "*mehrban*," which Steingass translates as "Benevolent, beneficent, kind, affectionate, friendly, compassionate, favouring, loving; propitious; a preserver, defender; a friend" (1354). Farrokh's choice of "Kind Gardener" is the more accurate choice although it loses a bit of the internal rhyme of the original, "*baghban-e mehrban*" that Talattof/Sharlet acquire in the consonance of "Good Gardener". Neither is better; they are simply different. One hits a certain literal accuracy and the other invites a little alliteration. The effect is

⁵⁴ This could also be an incredibly crafty tip of the hat from one translator to others about potential betrayals to the source and traitorous presentation to the target.

largely the same in the translation. What is lost, however, is the possible interpretive opportunity that speaks to much of the Sufi implication surrounding the character that “*mehrbān*” in the original leverages. The root of “*mehrbān*” is “*mehr*”, a term with a wide range of uses: “The sun; love; friendship, affection, kindness; mercy, pity; the month of September; the sixteenth day of every month; death; a mandrake; a red stone” and so on (1353). It is an epithet for Mohammad and the feminine version, “*mehra*”, is the name of the mother of Rostam, the grandest hero in all of classic Persian epic poetry. No matter what choice either of the translators made here, none of this could be expressed by anything in English. No matter what the source offers, the translator is confined to the limits of the culture into which he or she is translating. Short of a long footnote that touches on all of this insight about the root of this word and the various intonations it *could* carry to an astute Iranian reader, the translator will have to abbreviate this hermeneutic occasion.

The question is whether interrupting the reading experience is worth having this information. Nabokov would say not only yes, but that this information was critical, and anything less would result in a pathetic misunderstanding of the nuances of the text. Perhaps given that he was translating a work, *Onegin*, which had been treated to a half dozen other interpretations, Nabokov had the luxury of demanding exactitude. And that is exactly the point – *Onegin* had been treated to so many renderings, the story circulated to a massive public, it inspired continual retranslation. The same narrative, characters, events, climaxes, and conclusions offered multiple insights depending on the perspective from which they were viewed and re-presented.

Clearly, not all translation choices can be explained. Translation as a rhetorical hermeneutic act, like all human actions, is impossible to describe exhaustively. It is in these ways that the translation complicates hermeneutic analysis, because so much of the time, despite the

translator's best intention to remain faithful to a guiding hermeneutic principle, translations require a certain fluidity to accommodate unforeseeable contingencies. The bridge from source to target is anything but linear; it meanders, does loops, and sometimes even has huge gaps that require those crossing it to be able to leap. The sort of flexibility that we see exhibited here on the part of the translators reinforces the unique talents demanded in this work. Fidelity and malleability are foundational qualities in the pedagogy of translation, and thorns in the side of ready hermeneutic interpretation.

Turning toward the Neophyte

Regardless of whether translators are dealing with political activism or are those extremely removed from the source cultures, they are all working to speak to some audience that has yet to be formed. They are trying to teach something to people whom they perceive in their minds as yearning for information they cannot reach and likely do not even realize exists. It has yet to come into their horizon. The translator proposes the possibility of piercing the periphery of one's horizons toward broader panoramic worldviews.

Farrokh admits that he does not teach his translations to his students, although he uses the students to help him construct his rhetoric. He hopes that they will eventually discover his works on their own. They are involved in the choices he makes and how he translates. He sees something in his students that his work will speak to, eventually.

Broad academic movements intersecting with powerful social tides inspire Talattof who produces works that seek to advance both agendas. He tries to tap an essential sense of being in his audience to bridge inexpressible gaps between languages. Sharlet values the potential for translation to extend the life of a text by introducing it to new audiences. Their translation

choices were driven by all of these conditions and concerns, in addition to that fact that she and Talattof were teaching themselves each other's native language.

Neshat's adaptation of the film was inspired by both the source text, as well as the person who wrote it. In the book, Neshat discovered a kernel of Iranian identity that could connect and inform the world outside of Iran. The audience she attempted to reach were not those familiar with the book, but specifically people who could be open to a new interpretation of stories about women in Iran. In some ways, the same stories were told in a different way, using a powerful medium capable of reaching foreign audiences through images in a way impossible by words alone.

The translator is fundamentally a pedagogue defining her audience in the choices she makes, from the most practical and basic in choosing the text, through production of the work, to ultimately how and to whom it is circulated. As we have gone through all of the translations and the conversations about translations amongst the translators, the running thread is an authorial responsibility that the translator subsumes to fully sustain the didactic role that translations occupy. The translation is ever in service of a broader campaign to connect a source culture to a target audience with information that would not be accessible by any other means but such a deliberate interpretation.

Translation serves as a two-fold teaching method that on the one hand uses the mechanical process of translation to teach advanced students, like Talattof and Sharlet, how to more deeply understand a language by venturing beyond immersion into actual literary production, allowing them to explore the phenomenological effect that occurs in the move from immersion in to assumption of a language. In the construction of a translation, the translator swallows the language and shifts the foreign space from something environmentally occupied to

intrinsically experienced. Processing the experience through a cultural artifact that can then be evaluated, critiqued, and perhaps even reconstructed in some new iteration to create a wider circulation of ideas in the world, promotes literature that begets learning.

On the other hand, there is the long view conception of a student audience for whom we are preparing our translations. Venuti has already strongly advocated for the value of translation texts in the classroom:

The cultural difference of the foreign text, when translated, is always represented in accordance with target-language values that construct cultural identities for both foreign countries and domestic readers. [...] Studying translation can make students more aware of the domestic interest to which any translation submits the reader, as well as the foreign text. In a pedagogy of translated literature, learning respect for cultural difference goes hand in hand with learning the differences that comprise the cultural identity of the domestic reader. (*Scandals* 104)

Although Venuti correctly establishes the utility of translated material in advancing various pedagogical agendas, I narrow the audience focus in my pattern of inquiry to the neophyte. The more specific the audience, the more effective the rhetoric; when trying to summon the most uninitiated of students to a cosmopolitan classroom, every persuasive tool at our disposal ought to be employed. The students in our classrooms are cosmopolitans-in-waiting, however much they need to be invited into the global classroom of ideas. Speculating about the potentiality and needs of our students invokes an extraordinary consideration about what to translate, but more importantly, how to interpret it.

This is all beyond the basic fact that translations teach, but specifically in light of how the neophyte can grow and encourage growth in others. Instructing people that are not even aware that they are the audience, and using them to construct translations, continues to focus on the neophyte, but a neophyte still in the cocoon of the parochial. Not the cosmopolitan audience already reading translations, but creating new ones by new folks who are newly coming to the

ideas. To invite this non-cosmopolitan audience-in-form into the classroom that is translation. Like Farrokh, to look at what is already driving and inspiring them to make discreet choices in the production of the work so that they come to the work as it comes to them, leading to a potentially serendipitous collision of interests. It is not that translation needs to be entirely entrusted to neophytes, but when we are seeing audiences in our classrooms, as translators are often also academics, we should be paying strict attention to particular traits that could eventually make this audience interested in bringing the remote closer.

Following from the models that we have drawn out of these works of translation, in the next chapter I propose a pedagogical method that utilizes translation with a focus on the neophyte in a cycle of production, consumption, and reproduction.

CHAPTER 4 – A PEDAGOGY OF TRANSLATION: DAWN OF THE NEOPHYTE

Thus far, this pattern of inquiry into the pedagogy of translation has moved conceptually from an objective critical distance inward to the subjectivity of the agents. Starting with a close reading of *Women without Men* and both the context of its construction and that of the narrative it tells allowed us to evaluate a cultural artifact within both the internal landscape of the story and the life of the author when she wrote it. From this grounding in the text itself, the circulation of ideas therein was traced through the interlocutors' efforts – namely, the two English literary translations and the film adaptation, while maintaining focus on the productions within various literary traditions and applying theoretical models to posit hermeneutic principles. After examining the texts, source and translations, from these external perspectives, the creators themselves voiced their aims and schema. In expressing their methodology we could compare audience interpretation and reception to intention. We have consistently moved ever deeper within the process from sympathizing with the source and its iterations to discovering how its interpreters cultivated empathy with it. The closer we investigate the motivations of the translators, the more clearly their work is seen contoured by a didactic agenda. All throughout, the unrelenting element has been the special pedagogical force embedded in the composing and consuming of translated works by the neophyte who is either working to better learn a language through the process of translating texts in collaboration with others or a person newly developing a cosmopolitan worldview through the reading of translations.

The pedagogy of translation returns us to the servant that walks the student to the academy. It is the walking that most aptly describes the process of neophyte translation. Translation guides the mind toward a different place where learning of new information can occur. The experience of the servant reveals that translation is a fundamental aspect of our being

in the world already. It is a sense-making system that we can learn to apply in other areas of our life. The scholars at the *Women without Men* Symposium made it clear that more translation work is called for, but that necessitates training more people to do it, for whom value must be inherent to the process. A unanimous call for new voices resounded, underpinned by the need for those newly coming into a global worldview to have tools for understanding it. Being mindful of the potential pitfalls of inviting neophytes into the world of translation and understanding the limits of linguistic hospitality, we can adapt what we learned from these two translations of *Women without Men* in advocating translation production and instruction.

Communication as Metonymic Translation

Languages die. It is inevitable. Either new languages supplant extinct ones that are no longer utilized by a society, or the society that at one time employed them no longer exists. Dependent upon context and use, languages must evolve with people to remain pertinent. In the most fundamentally utilitarian perspective, there is nothing romantic about languages. To remain functional, languages demand routine maintenance much as one maintains any complex machine, be it a computer, space shuttle, or English. Otherwise they stop working and are dismantled for parts in newer, better machines or are simply forgotten in the corner until corroded so brittle they quietly crumble into oblivion. Latin is a prime example of a dead language that has been salvaged, whereas Etruscan has rapidly rusted into extinction.

The life of a language is contingent upon the quotidian use-value it presents for people. There is no country in the world that professes Latin to be the tongue of daily parlance. In fact, Latin has become a specialized language primarily used by theologians, scientists, or lawyers; otherwise, there is no real usage of this language amongst the masses. Given that, virtually no

translation work is done into Etruscan, as it would serve no purpose beyond perhaps a pedagogical one. There are, however, dozens of foreign peoples and cultures with whom we constantly engage that we can no longer assume will speak English. As the neophyte is a product and citizen of the world that is becoming increasingly connected, the need for cultivating a broader base of understanding will be critical. A world that grows smaller demands a form of hospitality that is perhaps the essential transcendental move needed to broach pure language.

Texts are subject to a similar double bind of death or evolution. The life of a text navigates through history. When authored, a text speaks to ideas that came before it, reflects on its times, and if its message is useful, may then be recalled in the future. More than its reception, the very existence of a text is contingent upon the context of its readership. The content is never exclusive of the context. In translating texts from source to target languages, we are not only re-ordering meaning and/or style, but redefining context as well.

Inevitably all translations re-contextualize the original, for the translator is incapable of becoming one with the original author and, at best, can only empathize with her. The translator attempts to enter into the author's feelings and thoughts, yet invariably discovers that myriad choices and aporia confront her. She may want to bring herself to the original, but she cannot help but to also bring the original to herself. The translator is bound to her language, its rhetoric and logic, all of which are primarily defined by her context.

Every speech act is a translation and thus a re-contextualization of abstract thoughts into communal codes, always embedded with intentional mistakes as well as unintentional ones. That we are always translating our beings is concisely summed up by Heidegger who wrote, "Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home" ("Letter on Humanism"). We navigate through life

constructing meaning by interpreting that which enters the horizon of our Being. The act of translation is not foreign to our nature; it is a model for how we express it.

The translator sinks into the gap between foreign spaces, bringing them closer to each other. Ideally, she does so without privileging either, but rather creating a third space where both exist separately but together, what Ricoeur calls *linguistic hospitality*, “where the pleasure of dwelling in the other’s language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one’s own welcoming house” (10). This hospitable space though is not merely something we encounter in the technical act of rendering other people’s thoughts from source language into target; in fact, we experience this process on the most primary level whenever we think. The first act of translation occurs when we move amorphic concepts in our minds, to the defined forms of language that are again further retranslated by whomever we speak to from their understanding of those linguistic forms into amorphic concepts in their minds. Domenico Jervolino writes:

To speak is already to translate (even when one is speaking one’s own native language or when one is speaking to oneself); further, one has to take into account the plurality of languages, which demand a more exacting encounter with the different Other. One is tempted to say that there is a plurality of languages because we are originally plural. The encounter with the Other cannot be avoided. If one accepts the necessary nature of the encounter, linguistic pluralism appears no longer as a malediction, as the received interpretation of the myth of Babel would have it, but as a condition which requires us to surrender the all-encompassing dream of a perfect language (and of a global translation, so to speak, without residues). The partiality and the finitude of individual languages is then viewed not as an insurmountable obstacle but as the very precondition of communication among individuals. (In Ricoeur xv)

Perhaps before Babel we were not blessed with a perfect language, but rather no language. A race of people graced with telepathy and no need for sympathy. There would be no need for a language to express ourselves as our thoughts would spill along a psychic ether toward whoever chose to receive us. The greatest tragedy following the fall of Babel was not that we had to learn

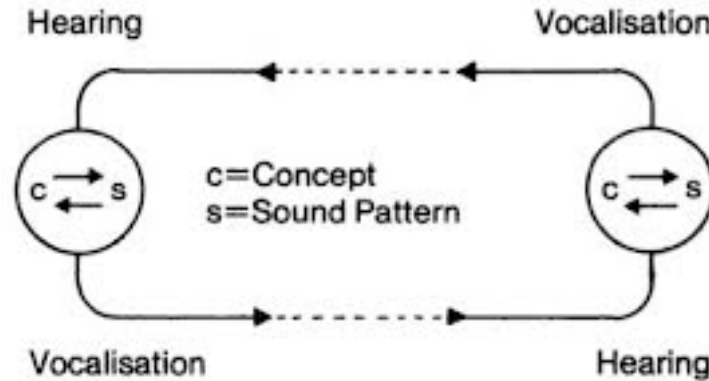
to speak to each other with a plethora of different languages, but instead that we were suddenly forced to express ourselves at all. The translation of boundless thoughts into the constraints of puny words is the basic and inevitable act of translation that most of us are stuck with for communication.

Before exploring the phenomenology of communication, it might be helpful to consider a structural accounting as offered by Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). He writes:

In order to identify what role linguistic structure plays within the totality of language, we must consider the individual act of speech and trace what takes place in the speech circuit. This act requires at least two individuals: without this minimum the circuit would not be complete. Suppose, then, we have two people, *A* and *B*, talking to each other:



The starting point of the circuit is in the brain of one individual, for instance *A*, where the facts of consciousness which we shall call concepts are associated with representations of linguistic signs or sound patterns by means of which they may be expressed. Let us suppose that a given concept triggers in the brain a corresponding sound pattern. This is an entirely *psychological* phenomenon, followed in turn by a *physiological* process: the brain transmits to the organs of phonation an impulse corresponding to the pattern. Then sound waves are sent from *A*'s mouth to *B*'s ear: a purely *physical* process. Next, the circuit continues in *B* in the opposite order: from ear to brain, the physiological transmission of the sound pattern; in the brain, the psychological association of this pattern with the corresponding concept. If *B* speaks in turn, this new act will pursue – from his brain to *A*'s – exactly the same course as the first, passing through the same successive phases, which we may represent as follows:



This analysis makes no claim to be complete. One could go on to distinguish the auditory sensation itself, the identification of that sensation with the latent sound pattern, the patterns of muscular movement associated with phonation, and so on. We have included only those elements considered essential; but our schematisation enables us straight away to separate the parts which are physical (sound waves) from those which are physiological (phonation and hearing) and those which are psychological (the sound patterns of words and the concepts). It is particularly important to note that the sound patterns of the words are not to be confused with actual sounds. The word patterns are psychological, just as the concepts associated with them are. (11-12)

Building from this structural model, the following is a simplified form of experience for a communication act as it flows in a single direction from Subject 1/speaker (S^1) to Subject 2/listener (S^2):

- 1 – Abstract thought “*Ursprung*” \Rightarrow Word unit(s) \Rightarrow Sound utterance of word unit(s) \Rightarrow
- 2 – Audible emission of sound utterance of word unit(s) from S^1 to $S^2 \Rightarrow$
- 3 – Auditory reception of sound utterance of word unit(s) \Rightarrow
- 4 – Word unit(s) \Rightarrow Abstract thought

The phenomenological structure of communication here operates through a series of metonymically embedded translations where 1 represents actions in the speaking subject (S^1), from the fountaining of an originary abstract thought (*Ursprung*) into its articulation as language and then sonic formulation. 2 and 3 show the external exchange of word units as sound utterances between speaker (S^1) and listener (S^2). 4 occurs in the mind of the listener (S^2) when shared concept (spoken word) etherealizes into abstract thought. Every step of this process

indicated by “ \Rightarrow ” is a site of translation where particular choices are made and thought is compromised, initiated in 1 and 2 and thereupon expanded in 3 and 4. As well, each “ \Rightarrow ” also contains a prospect for fathomless regress within the experiences of the subject.

Rife throughout this series of codes communicating abstract ideas are occasions where we are confronted by innumerable possibilities based on our experiences that we utilize to express the best approximation of the ideas in our minds. The codes are metonymic in that each contains either overt or subtle references to a gamut of unspoken or perhaps even unspeakable experiences, thoughts, and phenomena. The code itself is a mask, a secret played out in the public ether. As much as the codes may be shared by two subjects, this in no way immunizes them from the potential for misunderstanding and confusion. All of these hazards occur within the domain of a single code or language in just the attempt to translate our ephemeral thoughts in communicable expressions.

In every communication act there are unavoidable disruptions, occasions where in service of communicating feelings, precisely congruent words elude us; or, perhaps there exists a gap between what we think and how a language allows us to express this thought. This becomes all the more apparent once engaged in actual translation endeavors, moving ideas from one set of codes to a foreign one. Translators immediately discover that more often than not translating is a delicate balance of concessions.⁵⁵

Translators are diplomats between two nations, each inborn with a conviction to command authority over the other, but dependent upon the other for its mere existence.

Nevertheless, we must accept the aporia inherent to all levels of communication from the most

⁵⁵ In this case, perhaps it would be more accurate to call all communication “translation” and those situations where individuals are participating in the transferring of messages from one specific code to another code “meta-translations.” Of course this increasingly complicates what is already complicated enough; however, I write this as an aside to pointedly indicate the palimpsestic nature of communication and the limitless layers defining all translations, i.e. “meta-translations.”

basic, two people idly chatting in one language, to more complex ones, translating text from a specific language to a wholly different one. Following from this compromise of thoughts into the words expressing them to our fellows, if we are still committed to communication regardless of the miscomprehension potentialities, then we are complicit to an interplay between acute expression of meaning and the inevitable intended mistakes infused therein.

Given all of this complexity just being, why bother taxing ourselves with the added challenge of translating; this is to ponder, what should motivate translations? Is it merely about getting the job done – bringing a glimmer of new meaning where only confusion existed before? Is it about attentive precision in attempting to insure that the style of the text is not forsaken by the transmission of the message? Perhaps the purpose of the text supersedes both style and meaning, and so all that matters is the effect produced on the audience. These basic rhetorical inquiries must be addressed in every act of communication and at least doubly in explicit acts of translation. To answer the question of why bother translating, perhaps the simplest one is that we cannot help but to do it. It is our Being in the world.

All of the challenges we have examined in the translating of *Women without Men* into English are endured by all of us throughout our daily lives. And we respond to them quite identically as the translators did. Sometimes we conform to the audience, other times hope they make out what we are trying to say, and occasionally we just forget about it and accept that not everybody will understand us all of the time. Given that we are already cognitively adept at the process and the surplus of theories directing us toward various methods, the dearth of translations then simply needs an agent to address it.

As the world grows more intimate, the potential for globalism to mask as cosmopolitanism grows. This is a simple distinction: where globalism seeks to make others like

self, cosmopolitanism encourages self toward otherness; one flattens, whereas the other muddles. Unless we cultivate a large body of voices to interpret the events around us, we risk forging a world of monolithic views and categorical mandates. In the neophyte exists the potential for not just the burgeoning of empathy with the foreign through the translations they create, but also the inciting of sympathy with the foreign for others, who themselves are another sort of neophyte.

Translating for the People by the People – A Social Movement

From the space between two subjects, where confusion might lead to either neologism or silence, I prefer neologism. This is not a cry for the invention of new words à la Derrida or Heidegger, but an encouragement directed at language newcomers to creatively experiment in resistance to their Babelian confusion. Indubitably the value of translations crafted by experts with a profound awareness of the logic and rhetoric of both source and target languages cannot be undermined by the efforts of those with a nascent relationship to a foreign culture. However, the works of the literati need not overwhelm translation tasks taken up by those trying their hand at a literary translation for the first time. A faithful and intimate rendering of the text is at issue, and although an expert translation executed by a trained scholar may be one sort of intimacy, a one-night-stand with a virtual stranger is another. Both seek to cultivate understanding where there was none before – both are fraught with choices, mistakes, and intensions – both suggest the possibility of connecting with a stranger.

Freed from the burden/blessing of formal training and motivated or possibly coerced by inexperience and necessity, these linguistic tyros most liberally contort context, distort logic, and invert rhetoric. Without some sort of driving hermeneutic principle, the result is likely disastrous; however, from these translations we can draw out methods and contingencies to save a

neophyte's exploration of the foreign from devolving into a newbie fiasco. As not all neophytes are created alike, before proceeding let us begin by defining the two neophytes manifested in these two translations of *Women without Men*.

In the first translation by Talattof and Sharlet, two graduate students each competent in their own mother tongue filled in the gaps that exist between them. They looked to the text to teach them about their world and how they could best situate themselves within it. The work of Talattof/Sharlet proves that with a few critical contingencies, neophytes can develop the expertise during the process of collaboratively creating a new translation to eventually render a meaningful and faithful work. Their experience of maneuvering around their own grasp of language to interpret Parsipur empowered their academic careers and lives. The principal pedagogical value born of their efforts was to advance their grasp of a new language. That they had the conviction to commit to the process long enough to develop expertise and craft a text that has circulated around the world is not a guaranteed end of neophyte translation pedagogy, just as a child who sits at the piano for the first may not ever perform at Carnegie Hall; expertise is an ideal hope and perhaps a method of inspiring neophytes to practice more. In any case, regardless of the possible cultural artifacts produced, the unique engagement with the other that occurs specifically in the process of translation is the driving function of neophyte translation pedagogy.

Following from them, our first neophyte is on the production end of this process. He or she is learning the language, and of course, translating in that process. Discovering new words and grammar by drawing comparisons to the ones already known, the neophyte must do the best with what he or she has. Context, logic, and rhetoric are not destroyed, but disoriented just enough that following inspection, rumination, and revision the language they support eventually

grows richer. The process is arduous yet required in translating a text that demands significant interpretation.

In advocating for neophytes to attempt translations, it is vital to understand that there must be a degree of language competency in the translator, and this is where I want to make my departure from the rigorous and perhaps even ridiculous expectations of Spivak and Nabokov.⁵⁶ The threat they say is that if a language neophyte were to attempt wielding this powerful weapon clumsily, she would risk infecting the minds of others with her ill-begotten understanding of the source text. This is not only probably true, but a virtual certainty. Languages are too nuanced and idioms too embedded for somebody who is not colloquially familiar with a culture to try and unpack all of these ideas. There are so many pitfalls that it really demands a different tack.

Drawing upon her experience in this capacity, Sharlet underscored her fundamental understanding of Persian before undertaking the translation. She had been studying the language in graduate school for a couple of years and had a working vocabulary and an understanding of the grammar, and she knew the culture well enough that she could draw comparisons to her own life. Talattof, although a native Persian speaker, was still mastering English and struggled to fluidly express the nuances of the original in his translation. Neither one of them was in a position to take on the challenge of translating this text alone. They both had personal agendas, ranging from learning Persian or English to advocating an Iranian feminist discourse to deepening the well of material from which to teach and expanding the canon of World Literature; nevertheless, in collaborating, they were able to combine strengths and neutralize their deficiencies.

⁵⁶ Spivak writes that before one even considers translating, they ought to have “graduated into speaking, by choice or preference, of intimate matters in the language of the original” (“Politics...” 375-76). For Nabokov, cf. 8, 13, 177.

It is no wonder that Sharlet makes such a strong case for collaborative translation, given the opportunities for more invested scholarship that this experience exposed for her. Working together to competently complete what neither individual could alone is the most momentous component of the neophyte collaboration: the work must be done collaboratively, and preferably in this exact supplementary fashion where one person is a native speaker of the source language and the other of the target. This built-in vetting system also takes the empathizing aspect of translation from academic to experienced-in-person. The two translators have to come together and build from their combined knowledge of their respective mother tongues to create a Benjaminian pure language between them that expresses what they came together to decide was the meaning of the original. The partnership in real life echoes what the translation embodies in its literal one, and thus invokes a welcome tactility to a process that is often painstaking, lonely, and long. By uniting their individual competencies, the neophyte translating team erects a set of hermeneutic principles that balances their individual needs with their address to the audience. The essence of this neophyte experience is encapsulated as a commitment to synergy.

Neshat and Azari were also neophytes to feature filmmaking. They had spent decades honing their skills with other experiments in visual media, but their adaptation of *Women without Men* was their first linear, narrative feature length film. The process took them nearly a decade and hundreds of collaborators. Ultimately, they reached out to Madoff to smooth over the dialogue and tie the narrative together more elegantly. However neophyte they may have been at the beginning of that decade to this art form, by the time the film was released they had amassed an expert understanding of it.

The corollary to this neophyte translator is the neophyte reader of translations, that new audience not yet tainted by cosmopolitanism and still a little afraid of the unknown. This is the

audience for whom Farrokh is writing. Although Farrokh himself is far from new to Persian, English, or translating between them, he crafts his works with a specific neophyte audience in mind. His neophyte is learning where he sits on the globe, and thus, much of Farrokh's decisions elegantly deliver the narrative to this new audience, rather than demand the audience contort too much to understand the message. Farrokh is proud of not knowing if or what translation theories and traditions his work reflects. He forms his choices around personal tastes and intimate knowledge of an audience that is only beginning to show interest in foreign cultures. The authoritative control he commands over the text results in a far different result, specifically because he is not proceeding from prescribed methodology, but from instinct and interest. Farrokh is a career academic, who has been translating technical manuals since adolescence and although never formally trained in theories of translation, has had a half-century of practical experience as a translator founded upon his training as a scholar of rhetoric and composition. He evaluates the context and composes his texts based on the task of transmitting a newly formed message with the necessary insight added to coddle a tender neophyte audience, unlike Talattof/Sharlet, who are writing for people familiar enough with the source culture that they can forgo the sorts of supplementary information Farrokh offers in his. The neophyte reader of translations is not a cosmopolitan and has yet to intimately confront absolute incomparables. Farrokh aims to invest a sensitivity to this formative state and translates with the long-term intention to eventually fill in part of a cultural vacuum he observes as infecting his students. Which is to say, he is not writing for his current students and in fact has never taught anything he has ever translated to any of his students.

Farrokh studies his students' social awareness and cultural presence in the milieu of a dynamic world. He analyzes them and attempts to predict the lacunae in their eventual

understanding of the world, so as to help him determine what he will translate. His most primary decision in the process, what text to translate, he says is predicated on how he interprets his students' needs vis-à-vis the world that they are not currently, but will likely eventually, occupy based on what concepts, practices, and beliefs they embrace or neglect. So, although he himself is far from being a neophyte to either source or target language, and is also a well-experienced translator, his target audience does not even exist at the time he carries out his work: they are the epitome of neophytes in that they are as of yet in-formation. The interpretations and articulations of his choices are intended to express foreign concepts to the most uninitiated, least cosmopolitan folks, with the focused intent of initiating them into a global classroom they have thus far ignored, or never noticed. This then demands a reconsideration of some of his more bombastic translational choices.

At times, his translation of *Women without Men* too elegantly and gracefully washes away the foreignness of the original. The text mostly unfolds unfettered by any indication of its foreign roots, and when he does encounter a clash of concepts, he simply defers to footnotes. His didactic intention is obvious, but his long-view pragmatic drive is easily missed.

Returning to the opening of “Zarrinkolah” (Chapter 7), previously examined herein to indicate some of the disparate choices and ethics driving the work, it may appear that Farrokh is flattening out some of the key contextual details of the original.⁵⁷ Or perhaps, the audience he is writing to and for would really only be thrown, and the practical use value of the text would be harshly undermined. Farrokh is not necessarily disposing of complicated details, but perhaps only deciding what will best serve an audience that needs the story contoured in such a way that it begets further reading and inquiry. That this audience will have to work through the text

⁵⁷ Cf. 90, 170.

without the wonder of what or where the New City is constitutes a valid sacrifice for the greater goal of presenting them with an alluring invitation to learn a story that, according to Farrokh, they did not even realize they needed to know.

What defines neophyte translation is thus twofold: it is rooted in a didactic compulsion to teach, either others or oneself with the aim of teaching others, as well as a long view about the process as one that continues to unfold long after any translation effort has been replaced by others more germane to current contextual demands. The work can be done by groups of novices with a basic grasp of the language working together with the deliberate intent of using the process of translation to advance their understanding of a language, or by the translator crafting her work with a neophyte audience in mind that will be using the text in a specific way to fill gaps in their understanding of the world. Neither of these positions is common or necessarily welcome in the field of translation studies.

Neophyte-focused translation pedagogy is a far cry from any vision of the scholar stranded in a cave alone under stacks of books, dictionaries, and notes. On the production end, the neophyte is working collaboratively to enhance language acquisition and working toward mastery. On the reception side, the audience has been the subject of scrutiny by a translator who speculated about their needs and composed directly for them. In both cases, the translator is drawn from and returns back to a lived community of fellows to evolve. In some ways, it is an ancient concept adapted for a modern world.⁵⁸ This is a 21st century update of indubitably the most concerted and contrived translation campaign in history, *the Septuagint*. The legendary first translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into *Koine* Greek, the lingua franca of the ancient

⁵⁸ Miles offers a useful “real-world analogue” that may help to understand this cyclical process. He writes in an email about “Bible translation by churchmen who learn Greek and Hebrew and pursue advanced study less for its own sake than for the Church’s sake and who, after years of advanced study, take positions either in religious universities like LMU or in pulpits” (17 July 2014).

world for nearly a millennium, from about the time of Aristotle to the days of Paul the Persian, or more appropriately in terms of what really births and kills languages, from Alexander the Great to the birth of Islam. As the legend is told in the Letter of Aristeas (2nd century BCE), Ptolemy II commissioned this project by gathering six sages from each of the twelve tribes of Israel and had them work for centuries until this project was completed just before the end of the 2nd century BCE. Although all were so-called “sages”, what they were doing had never been done before, and there were no guiding theories, principles, or methods; it was a time in the dawn of modern cultural production where nearly everybody was a neophyte. They worked together to create a deeper and more resonant understanding of the world around them. It was not something any one of them could have accomplished but as a community unified behind this grand project that for the last two millennia has inspired more reflection, retranslation, and reaction than any single cultural artifact in the history of humankind. They could never have imagined the audience to whom they were writing.

The Septuagint was more than just a translation though; it was a landmark moment in the history of translation as a God-given portal for understanding our fellows. Miles explains:

The translation into Greek of what would become, though it had not yet become, the Jewish Bible has a cultural importance, moreover, that transcends Jewish ethnicity, for the Septuagint constitutes quite strikingly the *only* translation of any scope or importance ever made of another literature into classical or Hellenistic Greek. The Greeks had a powerful and well-grounded sense of their own originality. They had as well a wide-ranging curiosity about the many cultures they came into contact with. However, their curiosity did not, as we might put it, translate into translations. According to the Jewish legend preserved in the second-century BCE *Letter of Aristeas*, the Septuagint was commissioned by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, King of Egypt, for the *Museum* begun by his father Ptolemy I Soter, one of the epigones or immediate successors of Alexander the Great. According to a later embellishment of the legend, there were seventy-two translators, six for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, and they wrote in separate, locked chambers on the island of Pharos, in the harbor of Alexandria, producing translations that upon completion were found to be identical down to the last

word. The translation was thus shown to be a miracle and no less a gift of God than the original. ("The Greatest Translation of All Time?" 2-3)

Wherever this work falls on the scale of actuality versus fable, human corruption against divine instruction, it serves as the first example of both versions of the neophyte translator. In fact, its earliest reception by non-Christian Jews was particularly negative because it was seen as offering what was previously considered untranslatable to newly converted Christian Jews who could now access the Torah without a masterful grasp of Hebrew. The Septuagint allowed neophytes to Judaism an opportunity to develop their own hermeneutic principles about interpretation of divine concepts through a familiar language, even if the original Hebrew phonemes eluded them. Likewise, in the Septuagint's construction, a grand collaborative process occurred. Although the translators were all "sages" rather than neophytes, the work they were did, how it was accomplished, and the driving aims, all resulted in the creation of something indubitably new that served a profoundly pedagogical purpose. The process presented a gateway for far more masterful renderings of scripture that would arrive in subsequent centuries. Miles explains:

The Septuagint is not the first great translation ever produced. That honor, I believe, must be given to the translation of the Epic of Gilgamesh from Sumerian to Akkadian around 2700 BCE. And by now the Septuagint must be regarded as a translation largely in retirement, its great cultural work behind it. After its repudiation by the Jews who created it, its semi-repudiation by the Catholic Church that had celebrated it, and its more decisive decanonization by the Protestant churches a thousand years later, the Septuagint retained its status as Sacred Scripture only in the Greek Orthodox church and, by extension, in the several other Eastern Orthodox churches, most notably the Russian, whose versions of scripture were made from it. Produced in stages, over centuries of time, by many anonymous writers, the Septuagint had about it some of the ragged vitality of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. Jerome's Vulgate, by comparison, the work of a single prodigiously gifted writer, was far more harmonious and smoothly accomplished, though not without its own kind of vigor. Augustine, who knew neither Greek nor Hebrew but was easily Jerome's equal in Latin, knew that it would have been futile to resist his brother's masterpiece, even if it had lacked the backing of the pope. Moreover, by the time Jerome's Vulgate was fully promulgated, all of the most serious thinking had been done that provided Western as well as Eastern Christianity with the rationalization that had created

the Christian creeds and would hold Christendom together intellectually through the Dark Ages and the Arab Conquest. For those who did this foundational thinking, beginning with those who wrote the New Testament itself, the Septuagint simply *was* the Bible. They knew no other. They sought no better. The Septuagint could well afford to retire for it had risen splendidly to its historic occasion. It had saved one civilization from complete oblivion and, by bringing Athens and Jerusalem into conversation, it had set the stage for a new one. It was, truly, the greatest translation of all time. (23-24)

It is both the legendary tale of its production, as well as the audience for whom it was rendered that, as Miles suggests, does not make this the first great translation project ever undertaken, but for the last effecting it would have on translation and the circulation of ideas, perhaps the greatest one.

The pedagogy of translation derives from a desire to serve as a legislator for the betterment of not just one's current community, but the one that is ever-becoming and in-formation. The translator advances the most definitive and fundamental source of that betterment by circulating knowledge amongst people otherwise incapable of interaction. The nexus of pedagogue and translator is defined by the melioristic intentionality of the work carried out here. The hope is that the neophyte on the receiving end of this process may discover sympathies not just with the text read, but also with the neophyte translators writing – eventually changing this from a closed process to a reiterating and expanding cycle.

The Myth of the Perfect Translation

Accepting translation as a necessary act in the global age, the question of the translator's grasp of multiple languages ought to be addressed. Although parochial academics may contend that a worthwhile translation demands not just a gifted writer's command over the target language including areas such as vocabulary and grammar, but also near perfect understanding of culture, idioms, mores, history, and nuances of both source and target linguistic societies; that

level of intimate knowledge – rare in any single individual – can be amassed between several individuals. When a group of neophytes bring their ideas into conversation with one another, before committing to their translation, they have the opportunity to grapple with the concepts.

By confronting the problems of language and suffering the emotional struggles inherent in overcoming these problems, translators discover the depths of insight we ought to be cultivating, allowing for others to find variations upon our themes that deliberately invite other translations and even further retranslations. It is in these imperfections that the pedagogy unfolds. The line between a serious blunder and a mere foible is difficult to determine, almost impossible without access to and comprehension of the original, and only slightly less so without another rendering for comparison.

Lest I should be accused of apologizing too wantonly for errors made by translators, let me note that in some languages much depends on a dot. Persian is one of those languages.

- ح — “*Ham*”, A husband or wife’s father or relation; Making hot; heating; kindling; exciting, encouraging, hastening (a departure); tending towards, designing, purposing; the best part of anything. (Steingass 430)
- خم — “*Kham*”, Crooked, bent, twisted, curled, curved; a curl, knot, ringlet; crookedness, curvature, convexity; a ply, fold; a row, rank; flight; that part of the noose which encircles the neck. (473)
- جم — “*jam*”, Collecting, assembling, bringing together; an assemblage, congregation, gathering; the concourse of people at Muzdalifa on the occasion of the pilgrimage; conjunction; accumulation, aggregate, amount, sum total. (371)
- چم — “*cham*”, An easy air; a vacillating motion in walking; gained; prepared, arranged, curved, crooked, bent,; a lane full of windings; eating and drinking; signification, meaning; soul, energy; the eye; the breast; a disk made of plaited reeds used to winnow corn; name of one quarter of the town of Yazd; a summer garment; sin, crime. (398)

All of this to suggest that perhaps what may seem like a translator's blatant error, may result simply from a poorly published source text. Given the state of publishing in Iran, with the bulk of pirated texts sometimes only available from street vendors, a small blip with the Xerox machine, and suddenly a translator is a pariah. Mistakes happen in the publication of any text, but one of the even more vexing issues about translating is that there are in such cases more levels of interpretation required than just the narrative or the concepts. This can pose an opportunity for the neophyte reader of translations, where rationality may be so disturbed because a *cham* was misread as a *kham*, or even worse as a *jam*, then a new interpretive intersection may be discovered.

Neophyte-focused translation pedagogy explores the possibilities to stretch the flexibility of language during the learning process. Recognizing that the perfect translation is a myth as the criterion for even a good translation do not exist, as Ricoeur explains:

Because there is no absolute criterion for good translation; for such a criterion to be available, we would have to be able to compare the source and target texts with a third text which would bear the identical meaning that is supposed to be passed from the first to the second. The same thing said on both sides [...] Hence the paradox, before the dilemma: a good translation can aim only at a supposed *equivalence* that is not founded on a demonstrable *identity* of meaning. An equivalence without identity. This equivalence can only be sought, worked at, supposed. And the only way of criticizing a translation – something we can always do – is to suggest another supposed, alleged, better or different one. And this, moreover, is what happens in the world of professional translators. (22)

The translator's work does not aim for the perfect translation; it seeks to encourage the circulation of ideas by inviting others to return to a work and build on it. Ghanoonparvar explains, the process of translation far outweighs the purport of the final translation and thus must be endured despite the constant battles with fears of failure and self-doubt:

Like thousands of dominoes standing on end, arranged in an elaborate design only to be toppled at the touch of a finger – the effect of the collapse lasting for a

matter of seconds, as the first domino hits the second, which hits the third, and so on – what is important to the domino artist and the translator alike is the process rather than what is left after the process has ended. The process itself is what is important to them, not the end product. Once the process is finished, what is left – the collapsed dominoes or the translation – is only a reminder of the process.
(121)

By raising the process above the product, Ghanoonparvar expresses the nature of neophyte-focused translation pedagogy: encouragement of a cycle of knowledge production, refinement of communication methods, and an expansion of global idea circulation.

Ricoeur reminds us that much of our modern society is based on the constant retranslation a few seminal texts that “As far as the great texts of our culture are concerned, we essentially live on a few retranslations which are reworked over and over again. This is what happens with the Bible, with Homer, with Shakespeare, with all the writers cited above and with the philosophers, from Plato to Nietzsche and Heidegger” (22). In this sense, we are in a constant of constructing imperfect translations: texts that reveal the potential for empathy lurking in the hospitable space that the translation explores, but without monolithically suppressing the impetus in others to attempt alternate translations of the same text, rather inspiring such endeavors by others. Just as much as the perfect translation is impossible, the imperfect ones are inevitable. The aim is not to create a homogenized identity consumable by all of the world’s population, rather, a continuing cycle of people playing with ideas, and other people playing with their ideas, and so on. Translation is not merely a conduit to that end – it is integral.

From the Mouths of Babes ... Gibberish to Genius?

Given the long history of holding translators responsible for failing to correctly or adequately express the ideas of somebody else, there is valid anxiety about casting open the gates of communication to anybody with a computer and time. The fear largely brews from concerns

about interpretation and translation. The problem is that we are rarely privy to the actual intentionality of either the author or the translators when we receive their work. It is never clear whether we are reading a merely bad translation or an outright mistranslation. As upsetting as the former is to some, the latter is simply unacceptable to most.⁵⁹ The reason we should first dispense with translator intentionality in this regard is because sometimes texts are purposely mistranslated to serve some ulterior political, social, or economic motive. Unless the original is accessible, the translation is all we have. And if the original is accessible, and the language is familiar, then the translation is unnecessary or can be refuted. In which case, a new translation for the original can be constructed. That the first mistranslation has been *retranslated*, because perhaps it informed our decision, prompted us to take action to revise it. If that is the case, then it was retranslated. However, if the translator intended to translate the text regardless, then the motivation is born in the original text.

The obvious concern about neophyte translators is that their inexperience could lead to mistranslations circulating in the world of ideas. This is an absolutely valid concern, if their work was certain to reach the public. Neophyte translation is a pedagogic process to enhance language learning. The product is not a guarantee. The initial learning curve will render a great deal of gibberish, much as a child first sitting at a piano creates noise. The aspect of the process unique to translation production, though, allows for learning a language and culture through

⁵⁹ In an email to me, Miles suggests another excellent comparison to consider regarding “deliberate, at least implicitly malicious mistranslation.” He writes:

Given all the disincentives to attempt translation in the first place, how often does such deliberate mistranslation occur? Again, I think of the religious analogies. In early Christian centuries, Christians, reading the Septuagint and noting divergences from the Hebrew, accused the Jews of falsifying the original, and Jews returned the charge, faulting the Septuagint and turning against it, though it was a Jewish creation. The supreme example of a charge of malicious mis-transmission is the Qur’an’s endless indictment of the Jews and Christians for negligibly failing to preserve or maliciously adulterating their scriptures. Translation does not seem to figure in Muhammad/God’s charge, but the charge does come to my mind. (17 July 2014)

phenomenological fusion. It may not always result in the sort of expertise we find in exemplars like Talattof and Sharlet or Neshat and Azari. However, what I most find energizing in their work is the potential to motivate other neophytes to venture into the process. If there is one duty that all pedagogues ought to share, inspiring the cultivation of knowledge in and betterment of others is paramount.

As I pointed out earlier, part of what is demanded of foreign audiences to receive a work in translation is that they trust the translation.⁶⁰ They have to believe it is accurate or know it is a farce, otherwise they are duped. Whether they realize it at the time or never does not change the fact that what they believed to be a message, imbued with the purpose and essence of the original, carried from a foreign audience to them is intentionally not that.⁶¹ Just as I would not trust, nor expect, a child newly learning piano to proficiently play Liszt's "*Feux Follets*," I would not use a neophyte translation of Heidegger to teach, nor to learn German. Work constructed through the process of neophyte translation is not intended for such scrutiny, as it is developmental. If they reach the point of expertise and their work is circulated, then it must be critiqued – both for their betterment in future endeavors, as well as cultivation of the source text in the target language.

The responsibility of the translator as pedagogue is so much of why mistranslations are unacceptable in the field. The mistranslation necessitates intentionality on the part of the translator to dupe, whereas a bad translation is simply a mistake. However, the solution to both is the same.

⁶⁰ Cf. 6, 167.

⁶¹ This reminds me of the urban myth/truth about American getting Japanese symbols tattooed on their bodies, only to later discover that the symbols meant exactly the opposite of what they were told. At times, the Kanji meant nothing at all, just some tattoo artist's Asian inspired doodling – the P.F. Chang's of body art.

Quality in Quantities

It may seem in the most myopic and banal sense that this pedagogy prefers to embrace quantity over quality, but in fact it would be more accurate to perceive it as a promotion of *quantity toward qualities*.

This notion of qualities entails both a pragmatic sense of utilizing multitudinous perspectives to achieve the best end for the most individuals, as well as accomplishing an immediate cosmopolitan aim in the production of numerous dialogues, not necessarily toward agreement, but definitely toward involvement. It is through deeper scrutiny that understanding is cultivated, and again, understanding does not necessarily mean agreement. To be driven by a cosmopolitan ethic ensures that the translation produced, regardless of whether it is instantly good or desperate for revision, has infused within its structure not merely the potential but the mandate to be retranslated. Neophyte translators are taught to hone their craft by examining the work of other neophytes against that of professors emeriti translating in their free time between carpentry and writing. Neophyte readers of translation learn how to read the world by comparing the works of all these thinkers engaging with each other, sharing a didactic ethos, but distilled through subjective aims. All the while, the process at large concocts a bibliography of works that can become the basis for comparing good, bad, and mistranslated works, while allowing a historically static text reanimation and renewed dynamism through accelerated circulation.

In due course, most translators will encounter a text that obliges them to tend toward either style or meaning as the element of the source text they seek to most directly carry across into the target language. A perfect example of this brings us back to *Onegin*, first translated by Walter Arndt in 1963 with strict attention paid to Pushkin's original poetic structure. This translation was severely criticized by Nabokov for undermining meaning with style, and as such

his 1964 multi-volume translation forgoes style in favor of exacting transmission of the text's meaning. Beyond any individual's subjective preference and taste, neither translation is definitively more accurate or better – although, depending on the purpose, an argument can be made for preferring one over the other. Both are riddled with mistakes – both re-contextualize – and most importantly, both inspire further translations. In fact, Nabokov embarked upon this massive translation enterprise compelled by his scorn for efforts of those before him.

Neophyte-focused translation pedagogy is future-oriented, as it distinguishes itself upon inception as a tool for instruction, and therefore expects to be further developed, cultivated and expanded. Rather than functioning as a translation production machine, neophyte translation is language-learning process, focused on means, not end. Retranslations need not be inspired by scorn, but even from that source there has come the dissemination of new knowledge. For if Nabokov was not so upset, he may not have ever felt motivated enough to commit himself to this work. In what he could not help but recognize as flaws in the work of others, he perceived opportunities for improvements of his own making. This in turn inspired subsequent translators to attempt to fuse Nabokov's and Arndt's variations by attending to both style and meaning, crediting Nabokov's work for providing a breadth of innovative choices through deeper cultural understanding while assuming Arndt's focus on Pushkin's original style and structure.

This pedagogy may seem to tend a little too much toward the idealistic and hopeful, but is any real pedagogy other than idealistic and hopeful. Fears about interpretation and misinterpretation are valid but in some ways perhaps overblown. The value of a cultural production can be measured by its ultimate utility and not necessarily by its immediately enculturating capacity. That is to say, perhaps the greatest value of the previous translations of

Onegin was that they inspired Nabokov's.⁶² This is in no way to excuse bad translations, as there are no few of those, and perhaps almost as many intentionally butchered ones. Yet, if we do not encourage more translations, teach students how to do them, highlighting the enrichment that can result from the work, then we will be stuck with what we have. If there are more translations, then comparative investigation is a possibility, and that allows us to attempt some sketch of the hermeneutic principles at play evidenced within the discrepancies, as we have been able to do with the translation of *Women without Men*. Even without the original, in comparing the most overt divergences between the two texts, a reader is invited to question the reasoning behind them. The neophyte reading translations can be lured into exploration of the source in the original language by such curiosities. The pedagogical value of the text is measurable from either the production or reception end.

Women without Men yielded exceeding returns for all of the people involved in the process of translation, as well as its film adaptation. Talattof and Sharlet learned a language, expanded a feminist discourse, created an excellent text, and initiated an international circulation of Parsipur's work. Farrokh delivered a text for a different audience than the first, helped Parsipur curtail copyright anomalies, and continued to broaden the breadth of this narrative's reach. Neshat's film won the Silver Lion for Best Directing at the 2009 Venice Film Festival and was a "Special Presentation" that same year at the Toronto International Film Festival. Beyond all of these benefits, they each also stressed that the primary value and motivation for their endeavors were entirely formed around pedagogical drives.

⁶² Again, I am reminded of Oscar Wilde, who wrote, "The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it" (1023).

Found in Translation

I believe that the only way for people to not hate each other is by getting to know one another. And even though they may not come to love one another, apathy is a far cry from revulsion. The challenge of coming to understand our fellows demands a willingness to engage in complex and nuanced engagements, wherein misunderstandings are inevitable. Each of these occasions offers a choice to the participants: plod through the discomfort or disengage. The work we do as translators exists entirely in the paradigm of learning and teaching these difficult lessons, all the more complicated when working between such politically vexed cultures as Iran and America. It is so easy to be haunted by fears that this sort of high-minded erudition is antiquated and demands effort not remotely substantiated by the rewards. And I have come to realize that it is because of and not despite these things that such cultural productions matter all the more, especially the ideas, beliefs, and practices of those people that we are supposed to most dread or despise. I draw inspiration in this pursuit from Hesse, who also pondered the value of the rewards in the face of the challenges. He writes:

This matter of not being able to understand one another may not be as drastic as you make it out. Of course two peoples and two languages will never be able to communicate with each other so intimately as two individuals who belong to the same nation and speak the same language. But that is no reason to forgo the effort at communication. Within nations there are also barriers, which stand in the way of complete communication and complete mutual understanding, barriers of culture, education, talent, individuality. It might be asserted that every human being on earth can fundamentally hold a dialogue with every other human being, and it might also be asserted that there are no two persons in the world between whom genuine, whole, intimate understanding is possible—the one statement is as true as the other... To be sure, I too do not believe that you and I will ever be able to communicate fully, and without some residue of misunderstanding, with each other. But ...though we may speak different languages, if we are men of good will we shall have a great deal to say to each other, and beyond what is precisely communicable we can guess and sense a great deal about each other. At any rate let us try. (294)

It is incumbent on those folks that live across borders, between cultures, and outside of political identifications to forsake allegiance to any one side to make a case for a compassionate muddle in the middle. In the muck we may get lost amongst the strange shapes and hear only the pure stories. Or we may find that we are truly alone and there is no other voice in the darkness but our own. In either case though, we will not know unless we try. We have nothing to lose, but everything we do not know we stand to gain. So let us try, and try harder, then hopefully inspire others to try with us.

As a translator pedagogue, walking my master's child through the streets, I look down at the body attached to the hand in mine, and see as much a version of myself in him as I hope he sees in me. Although ever plagued with the finitude of language and the impossibility of perfection, perhaps in inviting the neophytes to advance this pedagogy, we might achieve a closer approximation to that state of being before Babel when there were no languages but only the stem cell of them all.

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