

**Mistifiction:**

**Mistranslation, Mistification, and Metafiction in the Age of Global Transactions**

What better place to begin than one of those literary *mêlées* in which writers and their heirs, translators and their agents, publishers and their lawyers are all entangled? So here we go: “Nabokov Son Files Suit To Block a Retold Lolita,” reads an October 1998 New York Times headline. The newspaper apprises us of the controversy around the scheduled release of the English translation of Pia Pera’s Lo’s Diary. In 1995, when the Italian “original” came out, it immediately struck its readers as an overt rewriting of Lolita. As the article’s author observes, Pera follows in the footsteps of the age-old tradition of writing as appropriation of other writings. This is the tradition of what in Memorious Discourse I call, with a wink at Borges’s “*Funes el memorioso*,” memorious writing: writing that “remembers” extant writings and rewrites them in order to write itself, writing that reaches deep into the archival past to present itself. For sure, this *memorious* “disorder,” this intertextual “condition,” is not a postmodern monopoly. “Long before Shakespeare,” the newspaper contributor informs us, “writers appropriated each other’s historical themes, plots and characters, refashioning them into new works” (Blumenthal 1998a, 9). But this practice. I would add, does become a recurring and defining feature in postmodernism, hits at the nerve of postmodern poetics and politics. It speaks to what the postmoderns tend to do as they “invent” what is a matter of public record, re-collecting intertextually and working over memories that may or may not be theirs. It goes without saying, this re-collection has been a

bone of contention for writers and critics alike, so it came as no surprise that the anticipated publication of a retelling of Nabokov's famous 1955 novel "from the nymphet's point of view" (Blumenthal 1998b, 7) set off a "legal battle over copyright infringement and the limits of artistic borrowing" (Blumenthal 1998a, 9). Despite Pera's claim that hers was a "transformative" response to Nabokov's "challenge" rather than an act of "aesthetic and literary vampirism," as the Nabokov estate had contended (Blumenthal 1998b, 7), the New York Times reports in its November 7, 1998 issue that Farrar, Straus & Giroux has canceled the publication of Lo's Diary. To be sure, the fact that Lolita itself "vampirizes" Edgar Allan Poe or that Kurt Vonnegut (Slapstick), Gilbert Sorrentino (Mulligan Stew), and Steven Millhauser (Edwin Mullhouse: The Life and Death of an American Writer, 1943-1954) had already reprised Nabokov played no role in the decision. While mentioning certain "flagrant" cases of modern reprise from "West Side Story"—which "poaches" on Romeo and Juliet—to Philip Roth's The Ghost Writer—which (ab)uses Anne Frank—the article highlights chiefly the legalistic offshoots. In doing so, it overlooks the cultural and historical ramifications of narrative remake, of postmodern representation generally. The New York Times contributor hardly wonders what renders memorious discourse possible if not inevitable these days and, vice versa, how it might affect the world in which it occurs.

Two points bear making here. First, both the "prototype" and its transatlantic rejoinder instantiate the intertextuality typical of moderns like Joyce, late moderns like Nabokov himself, and even more so of postmoderns like Pera (or Perec) who have unabashedly "stolen" from Nabokov. Memorious discourse may indeed have a long history behind it. Storytelling may have been Joycean "stolentelling" all along, as David Cowart reminds us (1993, 2). But, again, it is in

postmodernism that it becomes a widely self-acknowledged and multiply revisionary practice—a literary and cultural “dominant.” On a previous occasion, I singled out this reprise as a symptom of, and often discriminate retort to, an age of recycling and cloning. Here, I would stress something else: all the works listed above, whether “originals” or “copies,” modern or postmodern, belong to the same albeit vast and diverse Western tradition of literary borrowings, among which the postmodern remake or rewrite stands out as a particular, more salient case of appropriation.

Moreover—and this is my second point—such exchanges have accelerated and spread lately to an unforeseen degree. They have been spurred by, and in their turn have furthered, the global circulation, bartering, and overall refashioning of goods, values, discourses, texts, and representations across cultures. In other words, this crossliterary conversation has gotten increasingly crosscultural, carrying on and amplifying dramatically an otherwise longstanding process. Hence, the “interpellation” and appropriation of representations by new representations no longer obtain intraculturally, that is, predominantly within a national culture or cluster of related, usually neighboring cultures. Memorious representation—representation that re-presents and works over previous representations—is also intercultural in a notably transnational, indeed, intercontinental, worldly sense. The representational hybrids stemming from this commerce are taking postmodernism’s remembrance of things literary to another level, of more conspicuously and capaciously sociocultural and geopolitical significance, and into other spaces, dramatizing the new dynamic, velocity, and scope of global transactions. These crosscultural narrative representations bear witness to—and increase—the already growing mobility of texts, values, and symbols, the “interconnectedness” of the late twentieth-century “world system,” as Immanuel

Wallerstein's would call it. This "system" is not only economic but also literary, intertextual, representational, or, according to "modernist-at-large" Arjun Appadurai, "imaginary."

Inside this system, the position occupied by Lolita is twice relevant. For one thing, the novel is a major text in the Western late modern canon. For another, the book and its memorious legacy cast light on a certain progression, on the global integration and expansion of the aforementioned system. As I have suggested, if one steps back far enough, one could argue that Pera's "Italian Lolita," coming about as it does within the Euro-North American continuum, gives an intracultural reply to Nabokov. In what follows, I propose that we take a quick look, first, at a more markedly intercultural Nabokovian reprise: Lee Siegel's novel Love in a Dead Language. Where Pera employs the technique of the diary to let "Lo"'s voice be heard, Siegel deploys the complex trope of narrative "travel" and pseudo-translation to unfold an ampler, more ambitious, and inherently cosmopolitan panorama of stories, cultural and erotic affinities, compatibilities, traffickings, versions and con-versions, in brief, a vision attuned to our time's global developments.

A writer and professor of Indian religions at University of Hawai'i, Siegel shows, both in his scholarship and fiction, how discourse works as a vigorous agent of crosscultural, intertextual exchanges that set up a dialogue between Western and Eastern traditions through literary flows and narrative "vagrancy"—through "vagabond" stories. I focus here on his fiction rather than on his anthropological and religious research—which, incidentally, also mixes academic and more unorthodox, personal forms of presentation. His two novels, City of Dreadful Night (1995) and Love in a Dead Language (1999), pursue the role narrative representation and translation—mock translation, to be more precise—hold in the fostering of cultural languages that cut across local

idioms, geographies, and political-economic systems. Not unlike Mircea Eliade, another historian of religions who turned to fiction to flesh out scenarios of intercultural encounters (La nuit bengali, 1950, originally written in Romanian and translated as Bengal Nights in 1993), Siegel suspects that “stories unify the world,” as he puts it in City of Dreadful Night. “Real stories have no end,” his character Brahm Kathuwala assures his audience. “None of the storyteller’s stories,” he goes on, has

a beginning or an end—the story he has just told is but an interlude in a larger story . . . .

Though the weaver of tales often stops with but that’s another story, there are no other stories, no separate, discreet tales. There are no borders. All of the stories are intertwined and overlapping: characters from this one inevitably walk through that one, change this one, which suddenly gives new significance to the events in some other one. A bird migrates through this one to roost in that one, its call echoing across the interludes; a tiger pouncing in [t]his one lands in that one, is killed in this one and is reborn as some man or woman, good or wicked, in that one; those men and women, transmigrating [emphasis added] from story to story, connect all ages of the past, great ages of story, with the present . . . . All of the stories, each one having limited versions, each with infinite recensions, are interlocked and interlinked episodes of a greater, amorphous epic, and each contains the whole in a mysterious, unexplainable way . . . . Every story is embedded in the middle of this great, circular epic. There’s no way out of it. (49-50)

In Siegel’s world, stories, plots, motifs, characters, images travel—they travel a lot but not necessarily “well,” as we say of certain wines. For not only do they migrate; they “transmigrate.” That is, narrative materials change, are refurbished as they are exported to, or

traded in, unwonted locations, faster and more profoundly than ever before. City of Dreadful Night places Dracula in India and redoes Bram Stoker's work by detailing the "influence" of "Bra[h]m Stokerji" on Indian narratives of vampires, ghosts, ghouls, and ogres. Love in a Dead Language pinches Lolita but also Philip Roth's The Professor of Desire and Operation Shylock, and, especially, the Kamasutra. In Siegel's transcultural imaginary, Western stories and their characters voyage and turn up in Eastern garments, while Eastern texts rush to take up their places. Lolita is renamed Lalita (Gupta); one Leopold Roth, a Sanskrit scholar, does the "Humbert Humbert in India"; and the Kamasutra provides the erotic ideal to which Nabokovian sexual fantasies predictably fail to measure up.

Otherwise, Love in a Dead Language's plot is deceptively simple because, to adapt the classical distinction between inventio and dispositio, Siegel does not quite "invent." He does not "originate" his story. In postmodern fashion, he deliberately and ironically puts together an allusive, recognizable, intertextual and transcultural plot. Here, I can only begin to scratch the surface of its rich fabric. In any event, the reader might distinguish in it a basic metafictional convention, namely, the text and its "double" or "metatext," in the form of a translation, commentary, or both. Significantly, Siegel weaves two different formal traditions into this structure, Western and South-East Asian, and in this regard, he reminds me of Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy, Maxine Hong Kingston, Gish Jen, Maryse Condé, Édouard Glissant, Nicole Mones, Chinese-French novelist Dai Sijie, author of Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress, or Haruki Murakami and his stunning Kafka on the Shore. These are just a few among recent international, multiethnic, and postcolonial writers who draw narrative analogies, and thus straddle the divides, between West and East and North and South while

tackling—some of them more pointedly and more extensively than Siegel—migration, diasporas, acculturation and transculturation processes, planetary, human and economic flows, communication technologies, the growth of institutional structures such as transnational corporations and non-governmental organizations, and other conspicuous symptoms of globality.

What exactly happens in the novel? Love in a Dead Language is, or claims to be, as its full and fully ironic title says, “a romance by Lee Siegel[,] being”—at the same time!—“the Kamasutra of Guru Vatsyayana Mallanaga as translated and interpreted by Professor Leopold Roth with a foreword and annotation by Anang Saighal following the commentary of Pandit Pralayananga Lilaraja.” The “romance” re-romances, so to speak, Nabokov’s Lolita: “Lalita Gupta is the reason for this text,” Professor Roth confesses in his journal (Siegel 1999, 5). But Love in a Dead Language imitates structurally both Lolita, which is, we will remember, Humbert Humbert’s memoir prefaced and edited by one John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., and Pale Fire, which uses even more substantially the Russian-doll-like ploy of text-cum-commentary-cum-commentary-on-commentary and, in Siegel, shows up in a telltale reference to “Zemblan” language. Furthermore, Love in a Dead Language draws upon the Kamasutra of Vatsyayana (cca. third century C.E.), a real if elusive text, and upon the more mysterious translation into Persian of the original Sanskrit and commentary in verse by one Pralayananga Lilaraja, a seventeenth-century scholar and poet in the court of Shah Jahan at Agra. In the Foreword, Saighal tells us that, as an editor of Roth’s work, he is primarily interested in Pralayananga’s gloss of the Kamasutra, while Roth was attracted chiefly by Pralayananga’s translation, which Roth had translated in his dissertation (xv). I could not find Pralayananga’s text—Love in a Dead Language includes a bibliography, much of which has clearly been made up, à la Borges—and the fact that the name

of the book's editor as well as Lalita/Lolita's is anagrammatically inserted into Pralayananga's strikes me as a serious deterrent to further efforts in this direction.

Nonetheless, Siegel wants us to play the literary detective, and some things do raise relevantly "bookish" flags. As indicated in the title and then clarified in the "editor"'s Foreword, the "romance" is built around Professor Roth's translation. But this specification is mystifying because Roth's textual undertaking's underbelly is blatantly memorious. In other words, it has little to do with translation per se and everything to do with rewriting. The so-called translated passages are followed by comments where Roth does not discuss the Sanskrit original, or he does so superficially and only to the extent that the philological and pseudo-philological glosses to the original offer the pretext to recount his extramarital pursuit of Lalita Gupta, which pursuit in turn follows Nabokov's story. What is more, Leopold Roth is also an anagram of Philip Roth, and I can think of a number of Philip Roth books in which the erotic plot runs parallel or suggests parallels to what happens in Love in a Dead Language (it is noteworthy that Philip Roth's short novel, The Dying Animal, resembles Siegel's the most, but, of course, Roth's book came out after Siegel's).

Briefly, Leopold Roth's commentary chronicles, à la Nabokov, the relationship between a teenage Lalita and a university professor, her instructor of Indian civilization and culture, with the rather touristy discovery of India in lieu of Nabokov's transamerican journey, and ending with Roth's peculiarly "livresque" and mysterious demise—an unknown attacker apparently hit him over the head with a large Sanskrit-English dictionary. Here, the translation metaphor comes full—and tragicomic—circle. Before this, though, the word about the affair gets out and Roth faces public opprobrium, like so many of Philip Roth's heroes. Finally, a third layer of self-



referentiality, as metafictional as philological, presents Saighal's notes to Roth's *Lolita/Lalita* narrative, which also rework, as I have pointed out, Lilaraja's Persian comments, real or made up. Roth's literary "executor"—and this is interesting because Roth dies "by the book" and by a book, a translation tool—casts light on, and often attempts to explicate, Roth's translation as well as the *Lalita* scandal. All in all, this is an intertextual and metafictional "apparatus" that lures the reader into a Borgesian-Nabokovian, confounding maze of mutually mirroring narratives and narrative levels, allusions (to Nabokov and Philip Roth primarily), genuine or fake references and renditions, onomastic puns, double-entendre games, and various doubles such as: Leopold Roth and Lee Siegel; Leopold Roth, on the one hand, and Philip Roth, Paul Rotherberg, and Lee Siegel himself, on the other—Roth-Siegel is the ultimate diabolic double, à la "William Wilson," for another character, named Leopold Siegel, will take Roth's place as husband and faculty member at Western University in California; then, Siegel and Saighal, who studied with the fictional Siegel at University of Hawai'i; Roth's own daughter, Leila, who dies at *Lolita*'s age, and *Lolita* herself, and so forth.

But what does this all mean, and how much weight does it carry beyond the book's seemingly self-sufficient, formal acrobatics? Despite, or, quite the contrary, precisely due to its quips, jokes, hoaxes, mystifications, and plays, literary and otherwise, I would invite us to take *Love in a Dead Language* seriously given what it accomplishes stylistically as well as what it tells us about the defining ways in which we represent ourselves and our world. Alongside other authors variously classified as postmodern, postcolonial, diasporic, transnational, or multiethnic, Siegel raises the question of what Emily Apter has identified as "an emergent internationalized aesthetics" (2001, 1). His novel is a remarkable piece of stylistic and philological, even fake-

philological virtuosity that puts forth, and practices, a theory of cosmopolitan writing as translation. Two faces of the same coin, the practice and the theory alike have erotic, cultural, and narratological implications, which in turn are tightly intertwined, so much so that sorting them out and dealing with them separately is almost impossible. This translation model, to begin with, hints at a whole erotics of language that seizes both erotic and linguistic-textual matters as cosmopolitan expressions (the term “cosmopolitan” does occur frequently in Roth’s translation, that is, in the Sanskrit original Roth claims to be translating). The crosscultural language of desire and pleasure, on the one side, and the equally crosscultural texture of language and discourse, its essentially dialogical nature, on the other side, are what Siegel brings to the fore and performs through this metaphoric model of linguistic conversion. Cultural contact, we understand, is a form of erotics. Vice versa, erotic relationship implies an effort to cross the cultural divide by identifying a commonality beyond the idiomatic, beyond whatever “inferno” of alterity keeps the other, à la Sartre, apart from me. It is in this sense that love entails translation. And this is also how “transubstantiation” of pure, abstract desire into pleasure obtains, since pleasure here occurs in the heat of the other’s presence. This is how self finds its way to and as other, insofar as it becomes compatible with it, translatable into it. True, Professor Roth set out to produce a new English rendition of the Kamasutra. But linguistic translation is part of a broader phenomenology of cultural metamorphosis, resuscitation, and contact—contact as encounter and touch. Here is a brief Kamasutra passage in Roth’s rendition: “Women dream of being protected. A girl will be obliging once she is convinced that her seducer’s feelings for her will not change, that he will love her forever, even in death, or even if she abandons him” (Love in a Dead Language, 240). Roth’s “commentary” to the text follows, in the form of a notebook

entry dated July 4:

. . . and You've just now left and I open the text to translate for You and find in ancient India magic words that will make this summer a context to rediscover the ways in which enchantments and feelings felt by lovers two thousand years . . . again and eternal despite the transience of those of us who are but the . . . for those feelings and fears and desires and . . . I copy . . . words of a man whom we know nothing [ . . . ] and translate it without translating it feeling it without fixing it and reach for [the] Monier Williams [dictionary] to fill in what is hazy and mysterious and [ . . . ] know that You are the text with words familiar and yet so much unknown . . . inde[cip]herable . . . I . . . I . . . to translate You tenderly with love without changing You at all feeling You without fixing You and having the silences that precede Your arrivals and remain after Your departures like the blank spaces that precede and follow the stanza on the page and this translation that is not a translation is more of a translation perhaps than any of the o[thers] [ . . . ]. (240-241)

The July 4 entry commemorates, among other things, the passion of Vatsyayana, cosmopolitan “man-about-town” and author/compiler of the Kamasutra for his “doe-eyed lover.” The next entry, part of the same “commentary,” is completed on July 5. This is the “wedding anniversary” of Isabel Burton and Richard Burton (1821-1890), Orientalist and industrious translator whose famous works include unexpurgated versions of The Thousand and One Nights and The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana, which is mentioned in the bibliography Siegel appends to his novel. It is noteworthy that Burton’s two works listed by Siegel came out from a publishing house called Cosmopoli, in 1883 and 1885, respectively. The translator, we infer, is thus a cosmopolitan twice: an erudite, a linguistic and cultural broker but also, like Vatsyayana, Burton, and Professor

Roth himself, someone driven by unorthodox sexuality and “cosmopolitan,” transgressive desire. What this desire desires here is the other, otherness in a more general and culturally profound sense, where desire can mean desire for people different from us or a different (“cosmopolitan”) form of desire and sexual longing for somebody like us. Either way, desire has an “othering” effect. It orients us toward alterity and hence mounts a decisive challenge to the inertias (“fixities”) of our identity: we need to change in order for us to meet the challenge of the other as much as we have to find a way of “translating” the other—without “fixing,” jeopardizing, or fetishizing it—into a language that our self understands. In view of all this negotiation of linguistic, cultural, and existential positionings, the reference to Burton is multiply symbolic.

This is a notion that the July 5 entry goes on to expound. In so doing, it provides essential guidelines for the reading of Siegel’s multilayered narrative maze and therefore merits extensive reproduction:

I am celebrating the Burton’s wedding [. . .] like Dirty Dick himself, like it’s my anniversary—136 years today! I’d like to believe in reincarnation (Lalita says that even though She’s “not sure,” She thinks it makes sense [. . .] I long to luxuriate in an illusion of eternity (provided that it does not last too long). For a little while I’m playing with the fantasy that I am Richard Francis Burton reborn (for the fifty-five years between his death and my birth, I was an Indian [although I can’t, for the life of me, remember my name], no doubt knowledgeable then in the languages that I struggle to remember now.)

This work, the Kamasutra, is merely a rewriting, a new draft, an attempt to correct the first pass at the Sanskrit text 113 years ago. And this journal, my commentary, is but a reconstruction of a manuscript that Isabel incinerated when I died. Fearing that this text

might be misused to sponsor harsh judgments of my character, she threw my notebooks into a furnace, as the priests here toss bodies into a pyre. But the priests believe in transmigration. (Love in a Dead Language 241-242)

Later the same day, Roth—Roth “as” Burton—further develops the analogy between transmigration and translation, sexualized bodies and textualized objects. “‘Translation is reincarnation,’ he [Burton] said to me,” Roth fancies a dialogue with his hero, “and `and vice versa,’ I said to him” (242). Intertextual dealings, textual exchange and “friction” across space and time are deeply sexual, we gather. Writing, reading, translating—translating as rewriting, we saw above—conjure a heatedly erotic-Orientalist, hence possibly controversial, imaginary and, indeed, “vice versa”: as I have noted, any physical “contact,” “touch,” and so on presuppose a cultural “intercourse” of some kind, thus a test of our presumptions, representations, and ways of imagining (desiring) others. So, one more time, what Siegel reveals about us and our time reaches beyond the aesthetic, the comic, or the postmodern “ludic.” Funny, jocosely, and intertextually so, Siegel may remind the reader of another dexterous Nabokovian, John Barth, who indulges his humorous metafictional experimentalism and takes up issues of gender and power by lifting forms, settings, and characters from The Arabian Nights (see his novella “Dunyazadiad”). While working with a similar blend, Siegel assembles, more markedly than Barth, a cosmopolitan discourse that foregrounds, both in form and substance, the turn-of-the-millennium’s global assemblages, exchanges, and mobility. Acting out postmodernism’s quintessential relatedness, Siegel’s manifest and sophisticated narrative reprise addresses topically and reflects formally the global age’s cultural interconnectedness, the global-age cosmopolis. Key to his fictional project is the isomorphism between how his narrative

representations represent, what they represent, and where—the world in which they do it. This is how we stand to learn a broader, serious lesson from Siegel.

The Funesian image of memory as ever-outspreading network also helps us distinguish this lesson in Love in a Dead Language's twin models of narrative and cultural interconnectedness. These models simultaneously shape the novel's fictional world and convey the shape of the world under globalization. One is primarily, if not purely, narrative. As such, it raises chiefly narrative issues. It has to do with stories, what they are, and how they circulate or, as noted earlier, travel. The other lays emphasis on what inescapably happens to stories as they go around, on the translation travail necessarily brought to bear upon them when they enter the eroticized world of the other: another space, language, culture, and the whole Weltanschauung set into this otherness. First off, Siegel teaches us that stories cover the world in narrative so thoroughly that "there's no way out of it" (1995, 50). In this intertextually postmodern sense, there is, à la Andrei Codrescu and Don DeLillo, "no outside anymore," a position that Derrida's "generalized writing" theory equally endorses. On closer, deconstructive inspection, Derrida contends, "outside" and "inside" (1976, 44-65), "here" and "there," text and whatever we usually assume that stands outside it, its presumably nontextual context, upset the "exorbitant" (157), "supplemental" logic that has traditionally sought to prevent the dyads' elements from swapping places. But the swap does happen and, as a result, il n'y a pas de hors-texte. Frequent misreadings of the famous place in Of Grammatology notwithstanding, this means, as Michael Bérubé specifies, that "there is no outside-the-text" (1994, 104), no pristine, pre-textual limbo where people and things roam immune to textualization, cultural inscription, representation. And there is no hors-représentation, hors-texte or hors-récit—"outside-story"—anymore because,

with another Derridean suggestion, “text” or story, the form and vehicle of representation in this case, is, and acts as, a “hinge” rather than separate unit (Mowitt 1992, 93), or as a unit that holds together insofar as it joins other units akin in terms of both constitution and role. All texts are sites on which other texts swing and fasten onto each other, as Siegel’s storytelling alter-ego says. This is why and how they spread globally so that no place on earth is “safe” from them, left unclaimed by texts and representations, narrative-free. And this is also why globalization emerges as a domain of worldwide and mobile narrativity: in the very narrative enveloping, organizing, and unifying of the world, the global reveals itself, plays its makeup out. This global outspreading and intermingling of narratives across time and space is, in a very metafictionally postmodern vein, possibly the topic of Siegel’s texts as well as their structural principle. These texts speak to, arise in, and widen the global “storyscape,” to venture here a coinage analogical to Appadurai’s “mediascape.”

In relation to this prevailing narrative model, Siegel works out, and acts on, a second one, which encapsulates a theory of cosmopolitan writing as twofold translation: commonly understood translation, from one idiom into another, but also cultural translation, translation as trans-latio, travel, linking, and splicing up across all kinds of boundaries. In fact, the latter meaning of translation is the original one, and what we mean by translation today is the result of mistranslation! In Ada, Nabokov refers to certain literary works “transported” into English (1981, 403), and Umberto Eco is right to remind us that “the term translatio first appeared in the sense of ‘change,’ even of ‘transport,’ banking operation, botanical graft, and metaphor. Only in Seneca does it appear as a turning from one language into another. Likewise traducere meant to ‘lead beyond.’ The passage from transporting something from one place to another to translating

from one language [in]to another seems to be the result of an error by Leonardo Bruni, who had interpreted Aulus Gellius (Noctes I, 18) incorrectly. . .” (2001, 74). Thus, the Lolita-as-the-new-Kamasutra plot enacts, and speaks to, a trans-idiomatic paradigm of “attraction,” a global erotics of language and communication that seizes both eroticism and textuality as memorious, cosmopolitan aggregates. We have noticed, Siegel brings to the fore and performs the crosscultural language of desire and pleasure, on the one hand, and the equally crosscultural texture of language and discourse, its essentially dialogic-memorious nature, on the other hand. Here, love, truly being-with-the-other presupposes translation. But so do texts, for text is texture, representation as reprise, re-presentation, by condition never “original” commentary. Thus, writing is not reflection of an origin this side of the cultural and subjective divide (me/you; we/they; over here/over there) but entails translating, bringing the other and its textual body over, as well as translating from another text, from the text of otherness. The self “originates,” accordingly, in translation, more precisely, in a translation of the other(‘s stories) and in the underpinning rustle of tongues and voices. The postmodern writers of the global age teach us that this self can be “found in translation” and can be “founded” there. But in Siegel translation annotates, scrambles the letters—while struggling to preserve the “spirit,” à la Walter Benjamin’s Übersetzung—of what it translates, the putative original. Roth’s crosscultural reprise of Nabokov and of the Kamasutra is an “anagrammatical” feat where all fictional initiative is seen as a “relettering” operation across a multitude of gaps, borders, and divides.

This is another way of reiterating that Love in a Dead Language rests upon the concept of cosmopolitanism. Remarkably, this concept is in turn “narrativized,” woven into the story—simply becomes this story—through inventive deployments of the trope of translation. I use the



word trope advisedly because, as I have insisted, translation operates in the text as a rich, existential and cultural metaphor. That is, Siegel sees translation as a “border crossing” and multiply transgressive model, a prime cultural connector in the age of interconnectedness. Translation is a cosmopolitan vehicle launching links, equivalencies, and compatibilities across divides that are simultaneously ontological, economic, political, geographic, ethnic, and racial, spatial as well as historical, textual as well as sexual. It bridges visible and invisible gaps between people, places, and stories, in short, cultures. A Nabokovian rewriting itself, Love in a Dead Language overtly theorizes translation as rewriting, as transwriting, to be more exact. In a world that is becoming, at least to some of us, more and more accessible, stepping across borders is, unavoidably, a major form of motility—increased motility. It “carries over,” in all senses. In one of these senses, “border crossing” and the etymological meaning of translation overlap. Within this semantic space, translation signifies, as recent scholarship on translation makes clear, both rendition of an “original” into another language—a linguistic process—and circulation, which involves a whole range of linguistic and social aspects.

Circulation depends on “translatability,” as Emily Apter also reminds us in her essay “On Translation in a Global Market” (1). At the same time, as circulation or translatio occurs, as the displaced and relocated narratives, representations, meanings, and bodies—of works and people alike—“carry over,” they are translated into new idioms and worlds, linguistic and nonlinguistic, and are thereby revoked and reworked, worked over. In other words, translation does imply some deep-seated commonality, but it is this commonality that renders possible the “refounding” of difference, of a difference arising from rewriting-as-transwriting. Compatibility, identity or sameness on a certain level do not lead up to—translate into—duplication or repetition.

Whatever “carries over” carries within itself and to varying degrees of obviousness a cultural surplus, difference as both antecedent and “effect” of translating acts. This is translation’s inherent if not immediately obvious double-bind, the paradox of ever-re-traceable rewriting, which both postulates a preexistent writing yet to be rewritten and transformed, translated and routinely mistranslated because never got “right.” This also tells us that that writing is not “original” but derived, imported and transported—in all senses—from a previous text, which in turn refers back on another. In recent postmoderns like Eva Hoffman (Lost in Translation) and Azar Nafisi (Reading Lolita in Tehran) even reminiscence, biographical and autobiographical regression, becomes intertextual digression, journey in time, in personal memory, as much as a detour through textual space, through others’ memoirs. Not unlike Hoffman, Nafisi, Kathy Acker, Toni Morrison, Paul Auster, DeLillo, and other postmoderns, Siegel intimates that the narrative archeology of identity, if rigorous, “radical” enough, brings to light the “impurity” of our origins or roots (radices), shows that they are not original but impure, “second-hand,” and “renditions,” entwined with, or already engrafted, into other roots, translations of prior texts, afterlife of older life. While calling itself forth from the past and “saying” itself in the present, the “I” also says the “Thou,” à la Martin Buber, Lévinas, and Derrida, takes upon itself to tell its stories; my name names other names, spins the other(‘s) stories, translates them, in space and into the space of another language, into the other’s realm. No matter how “sincerely” I may struggle to speak to you, as I do so I translate from another idiom. Hence, my truest voice is always another’s, so I cannot but speak in tongues, ventriloquize another’s. It follows that all I can do is be a competent translator. Effectiveness, accuracy, and consistency here are a matter of listening to the rustle of otherness.

But hard as I may try to record this other language, then render it into “my own,” I cannot but fall short. Mock translation and failed or never completed translation may be a source of comic relief—because pretext of romance—in Siegel. But the classical equation traduttore-traditore has a serious flipside, too. His mistranslation-with-metafiction—his mystification—capture another cultural dominant of our time, more and conspicuous, I think, as cultural contact and negotiations intensify worldwide. As I encounter the other more often than ever before, I discover that this other is some other’s—including my own—“invention,” an invention as rethought by Stephen Greenblatt, though. That is to say, this other is a representation effect that depends on how effectively I ferret out, adapt, and weld preexistent representations of otherness together, the other’s stories as told and retold by storytellers other than him or her. But this applies to me as well, that is, to the “I”’s narrative production, to his or her always-already construction in narrative sites other than his or hers. Indeed, the “Thou” narrates the story of the “I” with feverish intensity. In this sense, my “true story”—quotation marks equally needed here—is always told by somebody else, by other and, before him or her, others. I am a version of their narratives, a version or “versant” of others, and how I come across greatly “hinges” upon how con-versant others are with storytelling in general since it is in their stories that my being “originates,” is represented and presented to the world. Moreover, I can be the only one speaking about myself, but as I do so, I still speak in tongues. As Eva Hoffman suggests in Lost in Translation, I mimic, perform, and translate others and their idioms because “my own” will never be able to shake off, “forget” the innumerable traces of language, history, culture, and emotion bespeaking the other, the others. In this light, I translate from a foreign language as I utter words in “my own”—that which I will never fully own. The other tongue, the other ultimately, is what,

not solely in what, my representation derives from, what represents me. So the other is also my "representative." Conversely, I am his or hers. I exist in and as this derivation, adrift, en dérive, with respect with him or her, ever indebted, as much as he or she are to others.

A fundamental, mutual indebtedness marks, then, the relation between me and others as authors of stories, texts, representations generally. Postmodern discourse shows, more insistently, explicitly, and with unprecedented awareness compared to other discourses, that the structure of memoriousness is also a structure of responsibility, has a whole ethics to it. This ethics—which is, simply put, the ethics of the postmodern, as far as I am concerned—refutes the blanket charges of ahistoricity, cultural superficiality, "irresponsibility," "gratuitousness," "amorality," and political "helplessness" usually brought against postmodernism. This rebuttal takes aim, among other things, at the largely modernist notion of a world in fragments—a world asunder, as I call it elsewhere. Postmodern writers, artists, critics, and philosophers—with Siegel among them—make us the gift of a different vision. Theirs is a memorious outlook. They unfold the canvas of a world multiply integrated, "vertically," in time, as "recent" narratives prove pregnant with narrative history, repositories of the cultural past, and "horizontally," as one story leads to another and to the domain of otherness. No doubt, this distinction is not as clear-cut as it looks, but by and large it helps us understand Siegel's hero when he insists that stories stitch time and space together.

Among countless other postmodern stories, Siegel's seeks to further sew the world together. That is to say, not only do they feature fictional situations showing what this sewing or stitching means. As stories, these texts themselves entwine, interlace, and otherwise seam our world with stories. So not only do they betoken the global Zeitgeist; not only do they impart a

feeling of global interconnectedness. City of Dreadful Night and Love in a Dead Language act as agents of globalization, of a certain kind of cosmopolitan, non-corporate kind of globalization. Memorious discourse and Castell's "network society" are, I submit, structurally compatible. The former reflects the latter's architecture, and its worldwide proliferation is symptom, tool, and part of this expanding network, contributing to the speeding up of our age's "time-space compression." David Harvey has identified this phenomenon as a "postmodern condition." I agree with the diagnosis, but what this verdict implies, I would add, is one more time the formal homology of the intertextually capacious postmodern, on the one hand, and the global, on the other.

This homology is far from perfect. Nor should it be perfect. On the one side, one can certainly make a case for an alliance, for postmodern discourse as an "accomplice" of that globalization which threatens us with what Updike calls in his novel Bech at Bay "deep-fried homogeneity (239) of the world. On the other side, the one I tend to situate myself, there are asymmetries and disjunctures whose oppositional potential cannot be ignored. For it is the memorious approach that helps us acknowledge this potential by seizing upon the structure of memoriousness, upon representation as re-representation, as a structure of responsibility. This is responsibility toward the other. This is an accountability deeply seated in, and posited by, the structure of otherness ingrained in postmodern representation as textual-cultural circulation and translation become as omnipresent as they are inevitable. As I write, compose, represent as a postmodern author, I re-collect traces and testimonies of otherness, of textual and cultural difference, and for this difference, for and to that which makes my representation, my work, and myself possible, I cannot but remain accountable. My work, if true to what it is and what I am—

if “original”—will always and paradoxically bear other marks, will remember other remembrances and texts. In this regard, one could claim that postmodern representation goes, or can go, against the grain of “globalization-as-homogenization.”

Postmodern authors and critics suspect that authorship and intertextual indebtedness are each other’s flipside, that to be an author is to go in debt, become indebted to other authors and others generally, to those Derridean “friends” from Politiques de l’amitié who have extended to them generous lines of credit—“originals” to translate from. In a way, postmodern representation is ever “on loan” from other representations even when the fine print of the lease or loan agreement is hardly legible. The “genuine” is always a version, as I say above. Accordingly, the “lines of credit” can be read “between the lines” of the postmodern novel or short stories, in fact are more often than not flaunted, shown off. The postmoderns do not shy away from crediting the memoriousness of their works, disclosing that these have grown “in the margins” of other works. They produce marginalia to marginalia, and extensively so. They elaborate “in the margins” of others and their texts. They “appropriate” themselves in this “marginal” form as they appropriate others and their texts. On the ground of this widespread poetics of appropriation, it is perhaps time to rethink the modern notion of originality memoriously, to imagine an ethics of “invention” and reevaluate our time’s authorial performances outside the box of “originality” and its traditional authority.

## Notes

1. Pera's book did come out eventually, in 1999, in Ann Goldstein's excellent translation, from a rather obscure press, Foxrock. Lo's Diary was prefaced as per a legal agreement, and in a rather nasty tone, by Nabokov's litigious son, Dmitri.

2. This is the focus of my 2001 book, Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning.

3. Lee Siegel's Net of Magic: Wonders and Deceptions in India bears mentioning here because it resembles his fictions in both focus (India) and structure. This is a scholarly book that weaves together personal and travel narrative in diary form, and anthropological-cultural research.

4. In a Foreword footnote, Saighal gives us a list of translations of the Kamasutra. The list includes real texts such as Richard Burton and F. F. Arbuthnot's but also a "Zemblan" version by one Romulus Arnor, which supposedly came out in 1956—another Nabokovian allusion.