

ARTICLE

Figuring the Guide in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Interpreter of Maladies', R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

Margaret-Anne Hutton

University of St Andrews, GB

mh80@st-andrews.ac.uk

The article offers a new comparative focus on E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) and Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Interpreter of Maladies' (1999) and critical insight into a certain mode of prescriptive postcolonial reading, represented here primarily by Spivak. Set alongside metaphors relating to tourism, the figure of the guide and the guided in their various literal manifestations are explored alongside readings of the guide as a figurative authorial and critical avatar, with the guided as readers. As paths are traced amongst the three texts, a link between guides and interpreters emerges, and it is suggested that another common metaphor, that of 'translation', might usefully be complemented, or indeed replaced, by that of 'interpreting'.

Knowing Subjects or, Reading as a Tourist

This article arose from a Master's in Comparative Literature class, for which students were asked to read R. K. Narayan's novel *The Guide* alongside Gayatri Spivak's essay 'How to Read a "Culturally Different" Book'.¹ Jhumpa Lahiri's short story 'Interpreter of Maladies' was added to the mix as a further text through which to read both the novel and the critical essay. The class kept returning to questions of cultural ownership and legitimacy: who can read what well, and how? Spivak's prescriptiveness clashed with the – predominantly white, Western – students' desire to tread their own paths and read their own way. In the classroom setting, I was divided between emphasising decolonisation of minds and syllabuses and validating creative exploratory readings. My own reading turned to the figure of the guide, common to all three works of fiction and signalled in Spivak's 'How to' title.

As a comparatist and interdisciplinarian, I believe in challenging excessive academic territoriality. I am not a postcolonial scholar. In what follows I am reading as a tourist in that field, albeit one who has prepared for the journey. Like their literal counterparts, figurative tourist-readers should be respectful of local custom and sensitive to hierarchies of power, but we should not ignore the fact that such travellers can also bring new ways of seeing which cannot necessarily be apprehended by designated tour guides. For researchers, this

¹ The essay was first published in *differences* (3.3, 1991) under the title 'Once Again a Leap into the Postcolonial Banal'. References here are to the 1994 revised version published in Barker, Hulme and Iverson.

can mean claiming the right to visit other disciplinary fields, while always being mindful of the ethical as well as epistemological implications of such figurative voyages. As teachers in the classroom, it means being aware of, and perhaps in some cases articulating, both the guide–guided pairing – which rarely maps directly and unequivocally onto teacher–students and which, as I will suggest, is premised on a static conception of cultural 'translation' – and the relationship between different forms of knowing and power which are mobilised whenever we read. Finally, as both teachers and researchers it means paying scrupulous heed to the metaphors we use: 'paths', 'field', 'journey', 'tourist', 'territoriality' – more of which later.

Starting from a Guiding Genealogy

In Jhumpa Lahiri's short story 'Interpreter of Maladies' (1999), tour guide Mr Kapasi finds himself increasingly attracted to Mrs Das, who is visiting the sites with her husband and children. While her family head off to explore the caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri, Mrs Das solicits the guide's advice on a personal matter. Published some four decades earlier, R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) sees Raju, another fictional tourist guide, become involved with a dysfunctional couple, seducing Rosie while her husband studies ancient friezes in a local cave system. By the end of the novel, Raju has expanded his guiding repertoire to include a stint as impresario as he helps Rosie launch a career in classical dance, before finally becoming the reluctant spiritual guide or *swami* to an entire village. A further and final step back in time takes us to E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) and another couple, Adela Quested and Ronny Heaslop, whose already faltering engagement disintegrates definitively after a sight-seeing trip to the Marabar caves organised by Aziz, 'the oriental guide'.

This literary lineage of guides has been recognised by few commentators, with connections tending to be identified only across pairings of texts – most often *A Passage to India* and 'Interpreter of Maladies' – with the focus falling squarely on postcolonial relations. To take just a handful of examples, Simon Lewis describes 'Interpreter of Maladies' as a 'postcolonial rewrite' of *A Passage to India* (Lewis, 219–21), while Susanna Ghazvinizadeh focuses on the theme of second-generation 'return' to South Asia, comparing the responses of Lahiri's 'Westernized' characters and those of Forster to the 'inscrutable' nature of India (Ghazvinizadeh, 92). Paul Brians suggests that Lahiri's story 'resembles in plot the episode in Narayan's *Guide* in which a tour guide is drawn to the Westernized wife of an Indian traveller', a comment that he does not choose to develop (Brians, 198). In his 'Introduction' to the 2005 Penguin Classic edition of Narayan's *The Guide*, Michael Gorra refers to the protagonist Raju as 'an interpreter of maladies', but neither identifies the source of this expression nor reflects further on its significance (Narayan, 2006, viii). Although herself an admirer of Narayan (the 'master', as she dubs him), Lahiri does not single out *The Guide* as a source of inspiration for 'Interpreter of Maladies', explaining that the title of her short story and the notion of medical interpreting came from an anecdote recounted by an acquaintance (Lahiri, 2006).²

Fictional guides Aziz, Raju and Mr Kapasi all appear in texts that have misunderstanding at their core. All do their guiding in India, though they do so in very different contexts. Forster's novel is set before Indian Independence and probes the tensions and relations amongst British, British-Indian and Indian characters. *The Guide* was written after Independence, and though it appears to span a period that ranges from pre- to post-Independence,³ it is primar-

² Note that Forster's amateur guide, Aziz, is also a doctor, while Narayan's Raju is described dispensing wise words to his acolytes as follows: 'His visitors sat patiently on a lower step, waiting for him to attend to them, like patients in a doctor's room' (*The Guide*, 14).

³ Gorra, *The Guide* 'Introduction': 'The presence of a "Collector" at the station's opening suggests that the British are still in charge [...]. *The Guide*'s last pages do suggest that Raju has lived on into an independent India' (Forster, xiii).

ily characterised by a paucity of historical or political markers. In spite of the inclusion of some anglicised names, Narayan's protagonists in *The Guide* are all Indian, as the narrator's rhetorical question reminds us: 'Why did she call herself Rosie? She did not come from a foreign land. She was just an Indian' (4).⁴ If Narayan's Rosie is 'just an Indian', Lahiri's Das family, whom we are told 'looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did' (44), are all American born. Such historical-political differences and the issues arising from them are important. My aim in what follows, however, is not to produce another postcolonial reading of these three texts but rather to interweave three critical strands, with three related objectives. First, new perspectives on the works in question are generated by examining the literal guides and those whom they guide, especially, though not only, with a focus on the guided as tourists. A second strand links these diegetic figures to extradiegetic subjects – author, reader and critic – with a view to exploring some of the ways in which these subjects may function as figurative guides and guided. Critical reflection on the use of figurative language, in the form not just of guiding but also tourism and translation, constitutes the third critical strand. Finally, the article as a whole sets out to perform and validate the concept of reading as a tourist.

“Perhaps it was the guide. [...] Let us call it the guide” (*A Passage to India*)

Aziz, the 'oriental guide' – a designation to which I will return – is the first character to appear in *A Passage to India*, in the context of a discussion about whether an Indian can establish a genuine friendship with an Englishman. By the final page of the novel, Aziz is proclaiming that “India shall be a nation! No foreigners of any sort!” This shift in attitude is precipitated by a trial that sees him accused of sexually assaulting Adela Quested during the sightseeing trip to the Marabar caves which he organises. Aziz's short-lived role as tour guide is apparently a failure: rather than being part of an attempt at cultural bridging – what Lahiri's guide might refer to as 'serving as an interpreter between nations' (Lahiri, 59) – the guiding process ends up highlighting and exacerbating existing tensions and misunderstandings.

Of course Aziz is not a tour guide by trade, but rather a doctor, who takes Adela Quested and Mrs Moore, mother of Adela's fiancé, to see the sights of the Marabar caves partly to avoid having to show the English visitors his own modest home and partly out of what the narrator suggests is a misplaced conflation of hospitality and intimacy. The potential shortcomings of guides are made explicit in Forster's novel, which draws attention to Aziz's lack of local knowledge during the sightseeing trip, albeit in a humorously phlegmatic manner: 'His ignorance became evident, and was really rather a drawback' (132); 'Aziz was “pretty sure they should come on some interesting old carvings soon”, but only meant he wished there were some carvings' (141). During an earlier conversation at headmaster Fielding's garden-house this lack of knowledge is linked to false epistemological assumptions based on the metonymic attribution of a role; Aziz is regarded as the subject who knows, and represents, India:

As for Miss Quested, she accepted everything Aziz said as true verbally. In her ignorance, she regarded him as 'India', and never surmised that his outlook was limited and his method inaccurate, and that no one is India. (65)

This observation is emphasised when it is later recalled in the context of the sightseeing trip, when Aziz talks history to Adela and Mrs Moore:

⁴ Raju confers the name 'Marco' on Rosie's husband, whose actual name we never discover. The obvious associations with explorer Marco Polo link the text to Forster's novel: Walt Whitman's poem 'Passage to India' includes the line: 'The first travelers, famous yet, Marco Polo, Batouta the Moor'.

'However, I mustn't delay you [Aziz speaks]. I see you are ready to start'.

'Not at all', she [Adela] said, sitting down by Mrs Moore again. 'We enjoy talk like this very much'. For at last he was talking about what he knew and felt, talking as he had in Fielding's garden-house; he was again *the oriental guide* whom they appreciated. (134, my emphasis)

Two issues are worth considering here. First, who designates – constructs – the guide as guide? In the above quotation, the final sentence is most likely to be read as a representation of the omniscient narrator's point of view. Reading slightly against the grain, however, but still within syntactic possibilities, the statement could also be a representation of Adela's point of view or even Aziz's own knowing, ironic insight. In each case, the status of the 'oriental guide' is necessarily inflected differently – the role of knowing subject variously imposed and assumed. Those being guided, too, may be perceived differently. During the trip to the Marabar caves, for instance, Adela is well aware of Aziz's lack of local knowledge: we are informed that she and Mrs Moore wish they were visiting a site that their guide 'would have appreciated and explained' (132). Adela may play the role of the interested tourist, but her thoughts suggest otherwise: "'Sightseeing bores me'" (143). From Aziz's point of view, Adela's is the colonial gaze of desired mastery: 'This pose of "seeing India" [...] was only a form of ruling India; no sympathy lay behind it' (291–2). As will become apparent in this and following sections, consideration of the ambiguous and shifting constructions of fictional guide and guided can open the way to a figurative reading implicating critics, authors and readers.

When it comes to knowing guides it is important to note that Forster's Aziz is not the only such figure in the text, and the manner in which the other guide is represented – or rather not represented – is significant. When Adela goes missing during the trip to the Marabar caves and a guide recruited from a local village explains to Aziz that she had entered one of the caves, Aziz strikes him in the face. The guide runs off, vanishing thereafter from the text. The missing guide, I suggest, can be read as a symbol of the epistemological aporia at the centre of the novel – what, if anything, happened in the cave? – since Forster famously withdraws the insights of his omniscient narrator at this point.⁵ The absence of authority, of the author-as-guide, gives readers free rein to explore the terrain, and interpretations surrounding the cave episode abound. Forster seems almost to toy with his readers, self-reflexively raising the spectre of the missing guide on several occasions: 'Who was the guide, and had he been found yet?' (178), ponders Fielding, later raising the issue of the guide's putative guilt with Adela and eliciting a very curious response: "'Perhaps it was the guide," she said quietly; the question had lost interest for her suddenly' (227). And again, when Fielding asks once more who, if anyone, followed her into cave: "'Let us call it the guide," she said indifferently. "It will never be known"' (248).

Paying attention to the figure of the missing guide when reading Forster alongside Lahiri, whose tour guide also works as an interpreter, leads to reflection about language. As Franz Pöchhacker notes: 'The role of interpreters [...] has been closely linked with such intermediary functions as messenger, guide, and negotiator' (Pöchhacker, 2016, 169). Interpreters, as Michael Cronin reminds us, 'generally function as native informants' (Cronin, 54). When Aziz tells Mrs Moore and Fielding of Adela's abrupt withdrawal from the cave expedition, he states (untruthfully): "'We were having an interesting talk with our guide, then the car was seen, so she decided to go down to her friend'" (148, my emphasis). We are not told if the local villager recruited as a guide speaks English or not, but it is unlikely that such a figure

⁵ For an analysis of earlier drafts of the novel, including MS. B, in which Adela is explicitly physically assaulted in the cave, see June Levine, 'Analysis of the Manuscripts of *A Passage to India*', *PMLA* 85.2 (1970): 284–94.

would. The first-person plural here both aligns Aziz with his English sightseers and masks the fact that his services as interpreter would most probably have been required in such a situation. Even if we assume that this fictional local guide did speak English, would he and Aziz not have conversed in the vernacular? A sleight of hand in the form of reported speech masks the language question: 'When he [Aziz] returned, he found the guide, alone, with his head on one side. He had heard a noise, he said'; 'The guide explained that she had gone into a cave' (144). Interpreters – and indeed the word itself – are written out of Forster's text.

Cronin includes amongst the epistemological issues surrounding the 'native informant/interpreter' the extent to which 'their familiarity with Western languages sets them apart from their own people' (Cronin, 54). Aziz, we know, speaks good English: Fielding is impressed by his mastery of a 'foreign tongue' (60). From Ronny's hostile perspective, he is 'the spoilt westernized' 'type' of Indian (70). The presence of two guides in *A Passage to India* highlights an epistemological tension or paradox: the missing local guide may be the bearer of local knowledge but cannot communicate it as he (let us assume) speaks only the vernacular; Aziz, the 'oriental guide', fails to assume a metonymic function, to represent India, not (just) because he is a Muslim, as some early critics suggested, but because he is 'set apart', to use Cronin's phrase, by his speaking of the coloniser's language. As we will see, tensions surrounding language choice and perceived guiding competence – who and how to represent India? – are at the heart of criticism directed at authors Narayan and Lahiri.

“What is the use of your calling yourself a guide if you do not know...?” (*The Guide*)

Narayan recalls Forster inscribing a (second-hand) copy of *A Passage to India* for him, before handing it over with the observation: “You will find it amusing, but don't read too much into it...” (Narayan, 1984). How much he did or did not read into it is not recorded, but features common to both texts are clear to see – most obviously in the form of a guide who shows visitors local caves and is involved in some manner of triangular relationship with a dysfunctional couple. Closer consideration of Forster's Aziz as guide emphasised the constructed nature of both guide and guided and the importance of language via the elision of the figure of the interpreter. Narayan's text opens up further possibilities. Raju, like Aziz, is playing a part – in fact three, as the novel's title embraces the character's role as tourist guide, impresario and *swami*, each representing modulations of possible guide–guided relations. Where I suggested that the missing guide in *A Passage to India* might be read as a symbol of Forster's (knowing) withdrawal of guidance, focus on Narayan's fictional guide allows me both to read *The Guide* as a highly self-reflexive work and to extend my discussion of extratextual guides and guided: authors, readers, but also critics.

My focus with respect to 'the critic' is on Spivak's 'How to Read a "Culturally Different" Book', whose critical infrastructure reflects its author's feminism, her embeddedness in Subaltern and Cultural Studies and her commitment to decolonisation. Spivak's essay was selected for a number of reasons. First, and most obviously, it focuses on Narayan's novel. Second, my decision to write this article arose from a classroom discussion, and 'How to Read' offers pedagogic advice, setting out 'to walk a conscientious teacher through' *The Guide*, ensuring that the teacher (and presumably the students) have sufficient knowledge 'to take the text[s] historically and/or politically' (Spivak, 1994, 126). Third, I believe that the essay's didactic, highly critical stance can productively be read alongside fictional representations of guide and guided in Narayan's novel. Finally, the prescriptive nature of Spivak's essay, especially its emphasis on writing as an act of cultural/political representation, and correct reading as an informed decoding of this representation, is not uncommon in works of postcolonial criticism. My reading of Spivak's essay through the figures of guides and guided can, in other

words, be extended to other critical responses that make prescriptive or insistently didactic claims about authors or readers.⁶

Setting herself up as guide, Spivak tells her readers how Narayan's novel should be read, criticising both the author and (some of) his readers.⁷ Just like Forster's guide Aziz, Narayan is castigated by Spivak for his metonymic shortcomings; he is deemed a poor guide to India. His failings, moreover, like those of Forster's guide, are in part tied to language – specifically, to his decision to write in English.⁸ For Spivak, Narayan can only ever be an 'Indo-Anglian' novelist of 'the nation as local colour' (Spivak, 1994, 129).⁹ Spivak's metonymic insistence that the author represent(s) India raises an obvious question: what if Narayan rejects the role of representative or cultural guide to India in which Spivak casts him? He is, after all, a self-confessed 'Reluctant Guru', who, when told by his hosts during a visiting professorship in the United States that a class wanted to hear him speak about Indian mysticism, pointed out "I know nothing about it". His host's reply – "That shouldn't matter at all" – placed Narayan in the same situation as his fictional guide Raju (Narayan, 1988, 102).¹⁰ Thanks to the first-person narrative segments of *The Guide*, the reader knows that Raju is no holy man proffering words of wisdom, at least initially. Crucially, however, what he knows or intends, or indeed wishes to be, is neither here nor there; his status as spiritual guide is bestowed upon him by the villagers, contingent on their needs and desires: 'They interpreted his words and applied them now to the present situation' (84). As with Forster and his missing guide, Narayan creates an epistemological aporia at a key point in his text by withdrawing his fictional guide's point of view: does Raju become a genuine guru? The absence of first-person narrative towards the close of the text has provoked as much interpretive zest as Forster's removal of the local guide's and omniscient narrator's insights into what took place in the Marabar cave.¹¹ Both authors, in fact, stressed their own refusal to act as all-knowing guides: Narayan, when asked if Raju dies a holy man, replied that he did not know (Lowe, 1993, 181); Forster stated that what happened to Adela in the cave was 'either a man, or the supernatural, or an illusion',

⁶ This might include, to give just two examples, Michel Pousse, when he states of Narayan's work that 'The rich symbolism accessible only to those who know a civilization from inside is wasted on the foreign reader' (Pousse, 98). Gita Rajan, whose conception of Lahiri's readers includes those with 'no special training or knowledge of literature', constructs a guide-guided relationship that emphasises authorly control and manipulation: 'Lahiri now directs readers' memories'; 'Lahiri carefully directs'; 'Lahiri carefully arranges' (Rajan, 129, 132).

⁷ Critiques of Spivak's 'How to Read' include Chelva Kanaganayakam, 'How to Teach *The Guide* as a Culturally Different Text', *Postcolonial Text* 1.2 (2005) and Fakrul Alam 'Reading N K Narayan Postcolonially', *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 21.1–2 (1998): 9–34. Alam registers the irony of Spivak acting as 'guide herself to the elite of the western academy', p. 24.

⁸ Spivak, 'How to Read': 'from the self-contained small-town world of *The guide* [sic], one would not be able to guess either that Tamil has one of the longest continuous literatures in India, and that both Tamil and Kannada [a language Narayan knew well] were active in literary production and experimentation at the time of the writing of *The guide*', p. 131.

⁹ For a different approach to anglophone Indian literature, including the work of Narayan, see G. J. V. Prasad, 'Writing Translation: The Strange Case of the Indian English Novel', in S. Bassnett and H. Trivedi (eds), *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge 1999), pp. 41–57. See also Zakia Pathak et al., 'From "The Prisonhouse of Orientalism"' in Peter Childs, *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader*, including the statement that 'The prestige of the English language has, if anything, soared since independence. English has now the status of an associative language, recognized by the Constitution of India', p. 378 [377–86].

¹⁰ Narayan points out in the same essay that his fate in the United States postdated that of his character, Raju: 'I felt myself in the same situation as Raju, the hero of my *Guide*', 'Reluctant Guru', pp. 104–5.

¹¹ As noted by Makarand Paranjape, the question of Raju's spiritual status (real or fake guru?) 'has exercised most readers of the novel ever since its publication', "'The Reluctant Guru": R. K. Narayan and *The Guide*', *South Asian Review*, 24.2 (2003): 176 [170–86].

adding 'And even if I know!'¹² Pursuing the analogy between guides and authors, and guided and readers, I suggest that while Spivak, like Narayan's villagers, is entitled, contingent on her own 'needs and desires', to construct Narayan as a guide (representing India) against his will, to both confer the role upon him and then accuse him of failing in it seems altogether more problematic.

'How to Read a "Culturally Different" Book' criticises not only Narayan but also 'the metropolitan reader [...] reading Commonwealth literature'. For this deficient reader, Spivak suggests, Narayan's 'limpid local colour prose' will be deemed satisfactory, as it will be for an Indian reader of Indian-Anglian fiction (129). The reader of 'high' vernacular literature, however, will see Narayan's style for what it actually is (*pace* Spivak): 'a tourist's convenience directed towards a casual unmoored international audience' (130). Spivak's critique of the metropolitan reader is largely premised on the assumption that such a reader lacks historical-cultural knowledge – in this case, knowledge relating to the subaltern *devadasi* figure, 'our implausible Rosie' (Spivak, 1994, 133). Teachers and readers of *The Guide* have a great deal to learn from Spivak's pedagogic essay, but they might also look to diegetic guides and guided in Narayan's novel for a different approach. Although both Forster's Aziz and Narayan's Raju lack local knowledge, the latter is content rather than uncomfortable in his bluffing, and consciously tailors his guiding spiel to suit the type of tourist client before him. If faced with 'the academic type' (43), Raju avoids all factual data, opting instead merely to describe the sights and allow his client to do all the talking – something the 'academic type' usually relishes. If the client is rather 'an innocent man', the guide has no qualms about fabricating his entire talk according to his mood (43), and the client goes away happy. Raju's view of guiding is a limited one at this point in the text, as his simple division of clients into knowing (academic)/not knowing (innocent) reveals. If we equate tourist clients and readers, Raju's classification nonetheless reminds us that different readers may seek, and be content with, different things: both 'facts and figures' (43) but also pleasure are important considerations. Extending this dynamic to a classroom situation might mean discussing with students the implications of their own status as 'academic' or 'innocent' as well as the ideal role for their teacher, positioned, one might hope, somewhere other than the extremes of fabricating guide or silent observer.

Paying attention to the literal (diegetic guides/guided) and the figurative (extradiegetic guides/guided) extends naturally to reflection on tourism itself as a trope. Spivak's critical deployment of the latter – for instance decrying Narayan's style as a 'tourist's convenience' – can be found elsewhere in her work. It is, for example, even more evident in 'The Burden of English', where, in the context of a discussion of the teaching of English literature in India, Spivak criticises Narayan in the following terms: 'It is from this base that R. K. Narayan can speak of "English in India" as if it were a jolly safari arranged by some better-bred version of the India Tourist Board' (Spivak, 1993, 135). V. S. Naipaul looks to the same field for his metaphors: 'In life as in literature, we received tourists. Subjection flattened, made dissimilar places alike. Narayan's India [...] was oddly like the Trinidad of my childhood' (Naipaul, 21). Although writing decades later, Lahiri is being criticised in similar metaphorical manner: failing adequately to represent India she produces 'tour-guiding works', examples of 'arm-chair tourism'; she misrepresents India by offering something adulcorated, 'not too spicy' (Shankar). Whether or not we subscribe to Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory and believe in the capacity of metaphors to structure our very grasp of experience,

¹² Letter from Forster to G. L. Dickinson, 26 June 1924, cited in Brenda Silver, 'From "Periphrasis, Power and Rape in *A Passage to India*"', in Peter Childs, *Post-colonial Theory and English Literature* (Edinburgh U P, 1999), p. 364.

there can be little doubt that metaphors direct and channel our understanding, nor that they are products of their time. Turning again to the classroom, it may be useful to question the genealogy and use of a trope such as tourism in critical works, especially when reading fictional texts that represent tourism. A sustained and self-reflexive use, such as can be found in Graham Huggan's study of the commodification of cultural difference, can be compared to more meme-like mentions elsewhere. More thought can be given to just how the vehicles 'tourism' and 'tourists' potentially circumscribe our view of the tenor, and to how the field (another spatial metaphor) from which these are drawn has evolved. By the 1970s critics such as Dean MacCannell were already challenging negative conceptualisations of the tourist.¹³ Today, Tourism Studies explores a wide range of tourist types and experiences, from the simple pleasure-seeker to those who 'know that there is no authentic tourist experience, that there are merely a series of games of texts that can be played' (Urry and Larsen, 9).

My reading of Spivak as guide has so far been tied to the fictional representation of Aziz and Raju as tour guides as well as to the latter as reluctant *swami*. 'How to Read' can also be considered in the light of Raju as he appears in another of his guide roles: that of impresario. As part of her critique, Spivak chastises Narayan for his apparent side-lining and instrumentalising of Rosie in the interest of the male protagonist.¹⁴ But there is another reading. Although Rosie is initially described in passive terms – 'My guidance was enough. She accepted it in absolutely unquestioning faith and ignored everything else completely' (131–2) – her erstwhile guide soon recognises that he cannot proceed in his role unaided. In terms that hark back to his tour guiding days, Raju notes that while it might be possible to 'bluff one's way through and trust to luck', learning the 'jargon' and 'idiom' of dance is a better course of action. In teaching him the terminology of classical dance, Rosie too becomes a guide, in sharp contrast to her husband, Marco, whose discourse and attitude leave Raju feeling inadequate and wishing he 'had been schooled in a jargon-picking institution' (100). Rosie may be written out of the last section of the text, but by then, we are told (in interesting metaphorical manner), 'the mastery had passed to her' (173); 'Her empire was expanding rather than shrinking' (182). Raju's lesson valorises collaboration and shared competence over didacticism and potentially alienating 'jargon'.

One final, but crucial reading of Spivak's guidance remains. The critic's claim that Rosie and Marco share 'a bond' based on 'their passion for their cultural labour' (Spivak, 1994, 132) can be reappraised in the light of Marco's refusal, or inability, to see a link between his work and Rosie's dance. From Marco's point of view, a frieze of ancient musical notations which he uncovers on a cave wall simply has no connection to Rosie's living classical dance (115). In his eyes the written text, in the form of both the frieze and the academic monograph ('*Cultural History of South India*') that he produces as a result of his fieldwork, has value where performance does not. Knowing subjects and ways of knowing are once more at stake here. Rosie's is a performative interpretation, an affective embodiment and bodying forth of knowledge which finds an echo in *A Passage to India*, both in the splitting implied in the phrase cited above describing what guide Aziz 'knew and felt' (Forster, 134, my emphasis) and in Adela's realisation that married life with Ronny would inevitably mean that 'She would see India always as a frieze, never as a spirit' (43). I will return to this differentiation between

¹³ See, for instance, Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976). For a useful overview of changes in approach see Natan Urieli, 'The Tourist Experience: Conceptual Developments', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32 (2005): 199–216.

¹⁴ *A Passage to India* has also been criticised for its apparent instrumentalising of female characters, the latter regarded as serving merely to allow men to get close to each other. With this in mind, more could perhaps be made of Raju's (apparently) passing observation that Marco would have been happy to have caretaker Joseph as a wife (99).

performance and stasis, the affective and the cognitive, at the close of this article, where I suggest once more that this diegetic guidance can be extended to extradiegetic subjects.

**“But we do not face a language barrier. What need is there for an interpreter?”
(Interpreter of Maladies)**

Unlike Forster's Aziz or Narayan's Raju, Lahiri's Mr Kapasi is an entirely reliable guide when it comes to imparting local knowledge to his tourist customers; there is no suggestion here of bluffing. As we have seen, however, those being guided may have their own agenda and approach. As the Das family arrives at the Konarak Sun Temple, Mr Kapasi begins his talk in just the sort of manner that Narayan's Raju avoided when faced with anything but 'an innocent man'. Not for him the eschewal of 'all mention of facts and figures' (*The Guide*, 43):

Mr Kapasi explained that the temple had been built between A.D. 1243 and 1255, with the efforts of twelve hundred artisans, by the great ruler of the Ganga dynasty, King Narasimhadeva the First, to commemorate his victory against the Muslim army. (56)

One member of the audience, however, looks elsewhere for guidance. Mr Das is extremely attached to his guidebook, which is mentioned on several occasions:¹⁵ 'He [Mr Das] glanced up from his paperback tour book, which said "INDIA" in yellow letters' (44); 'Mr Das was absorbed by his tour book' (54). Although Mr Kapasi perseveres, his client soon interrupts the tour talk: "It says the temple occupies about a hundred and seventy acres of land," Mr Das said, reading from his book' (56). Cronin points to the link between the advent of the guidebook and the use of local guides: 'the presence of the guide/interpreter was not always welcome. Karl Baedeker, indeed, saw the advent of the guidebook as a step on the road to freedom from interpreting' (Cronin, 393–4). Ignoring local guide and interpreter Mr Kapasi, Mr Das, an academic (in this case a schoolteacher) like Narayan's Marco, privileges the fixed written text over the embodied performance.

The tension set up between modes of guidance and knowledge extends to a questioning of geopolitical source: Mr Das's guidebook, we are told, 'looked as if it had been published abroad' (44). Although *A Passage to India* does not feature guidebooks,¹⁶ several critics have commented on the author's description of the landscape at the start of the text's first two parts ('Mosque' and 'Caves') as 'deceptively guide-bookish' (Bradbury, 236–7); 'with the touch of the guide-book' (Kermode, 218); each beginning 'Baedeker-like, in the present tense' (Dowling, 257). For Simon Featherstone these passages are parodic, both evoking and undermining guidebook discourse, and serving thereby to signal the limits of knowledge.¹⁷ Forster's

¹⁵ In her discussion of 'Interpreter of Maladies' (one of several texts surveyed in her chapter) in terms of 'ethnic return', Ruth Maxey suggests that the Das family's 'diasporic vulnerability is represented by their reliance on various objects – guidebook, camera, nail polish, hairbrush – for comfort and support: a consumerist dependence which possibly critiques the materialistic, introspective American society to which they belong' (95).

¹⁶ Although no Baedeker guidebook appears in *A Passage to India* – indeed none for India existed at the time – the guide to Italy does, of course, feature in Forster's *A Room with a View*.

¹⁷ Featherstone compares these descriptions to Forster's 1922 *Alexandria: A History and Guide*, which interrupted the writing of *A Passage*, and which he describes as 'less guide to the city than a guide to the way in which Baedekers construct their versions of foreign places', seeing this as 'an elegant admission of the limitations of knowledge' (291). Forster also expresses such limitations geographically – or rather extra-terrestrially – via the figure of the moon. Adela and Mrs Moore play cards 'up in the Civil Lines' and go over the day's events: 'interspersing among amongst the intricacies of the play details about the hyena, the engagement, the Maharani of Mudkul, the Bhattacharyas, and the day generally, whose rough desiccated surface acquired as it receded a definite outline, as India itself might, could it be viewed from the moon' (91). Such a perspective was not, of course, possible at the time. In its Indian edition, *Interpreter of Maladies* (the volume of short stories) is subtitled 'Stories of Bengal, Boston and Beyond' – the 'Beyond' probably an allusion to the American moon landings featuring in

guidebook parody, in other words, can be said to represent the author's questioning of his own role as guide to India. Narayan, for his part, operates via gentle irony. When an American film crew is introduced at the close of *The Guide*, the fictional director, keen to show his audience this representative (in fact, stereotypical) Indian guru, expresses his intentions in terms ominously reminiscent of both big game trophy hunting and museum collecting: 'I have come to shoot this subject, take it back to our country, and show it to our people there' (192). As teachers and readers of texts, we may wish to compare our responsibilities to those of Narayan's director, who we are informed, with a gentle touch of irony, had 'briefed himself on all the local manners' (192). Although we learn that Narayan's American film director 'had picked up an interpreter in Madras' (192), no further reference is made to this shadowy figure, and at the very close of the text, it is revealed that Raju 'knows English' (192).

'Interpreter of Maladies' restores the missing figure of the interpreter – Mr Kapasi is explicitly both a tour guide and an interpreter – but the roles are kept distinct: tour guiding takes place on Fridays and Saturdays, with the rest of the time given over to community interpreting in a doctor's surgery, where he translates patients' symptoms from Gujarati (into Hindi, one might think, as this is the official language of the state, but it is not specified). A fascinating exchange is staged between Mr Kapasi and Mrs Das. In what follows Mrs Das has just informed the interpreter-guide that one of her sons is illegitimate, and now seeks his advice:

'Mr Kapasi, don't you have anything to say? I thought that was your job.'

'My job is to give tours, Mrs Das.'

'Not that. Your other job. As an interpreter.'

'But we do not face a language barrier. What need is there for an interpreter?' (65)

This ostensibly simple but actually rather knotty exchange takes us back to the familiar territory of the reluctant guide and misunderstanding. Significantly, it also serves to foreground the play of literal and metaphorical translation, or 'translation'. Although Mr Kapasi and Mrs Das both speak English, the impersonal question 'What need is there for an interpreter?' does not necessarily follow from the assertion 'We do not face a language barrier'.¹⁸ Mr Kapasi and Mrs Das may literally speak the same language, but they do not do so figuratively. In fact, Mrs Das's disclosure of her infidelity and her request for guidance discomfits Mr Kapasi as greatly as does Adela's questioning of Aziz on marital matters, levering open the cultural differences between them. Paradoxically, the very exchange, carried out 'in the same language', performs a negation of Mr Kapasi's suggestion that no mediating figure is required.

This tension between figurative and literal acts of translation returns us to authors and critics. As Susan Bassnett notes: 'By the mid-1990s, translation had come to acquire a broad-based metaphoric significance in postcolonial writing' (Bassnett, 342) – a move, as Anthony Pym puts it, towards 'translation without translations (Pym, 144). Lahiri, just like her fictional interpreter, slips easily from the literal to the figurative: what appears to be a reference to the interlinguistic may morph, mid-sentence, into the intercultural.¹⁹ 'Almost all of my char-

the last story ('The Third and Final Continent'), and marking both US expansionism/globalisation and a space levering open the India/United States binary.

¹⁸ As a medical interpreter Mr Kapasi should know better. As Angeletti observes, 'even when HCP [healthcare provider] and patient share the same language, the differences in their cultural norms can lead to miscommunications and misunderstandings', Claudia Angeletti, *Medical Interpreting and Cross-cultural Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), p. 19.

¹⁹ The shift to figurative 'translation' may be signalled by a qualifier (usually 'cultural'), as in Menon's assertion that in the Indian context cultural translation consists of 'literary works about India, authored by resident or expatriate authors, Indian or non-Indian writers [...] largely, if not all, written in one language – English' (Menon, 118).

acters are translators', she asserts, before continuing, 'inasmuch as they must make sense of the foreign to survive', earning the contempt of Harish Trivedi for the 'gratuitous trope' (Trivedi, 285).²⁰

'Making sense of the foreign' is represented as something of a failure in *A Passage to India*, *The Guide* and 'Interpreter of Maladies'. Spivak's 'How to Read a "Culturally Different" Book', for its part, met with resistance in the classroom, its didacticism both jarring and seeming to do metaphorical violence to the integrity of what the text has to say. The three works of fiction can, however, offer another way forward. In what has preceded I have suggested that stasis – the spatial and the written – is set against movement and embodied performance, and that knowing may be associated with affect, passion and 'spirit'. Need, desire and the contingent are also foregrounded, whether in the form of Narayan's villagers making a reluctant guide of Aziz, or Mrs Das's search for moral guidance from Mr Kapasi. In *Postcolonial Poetics*, Elleke Boehmer calls for a poetics conceptualised as 'score, as in music or dance', with the reader as 'the interpreter of that score, even as its performer' (Boehmer, 9).²¹ I would like to end by considering a slightly different interpreting metaphor.

Interpret, v.

1. a. transitive. To expound the meaning of [...].

1. c. In recent use: To bring out the meaning of (a dramatic or musical composition, a landscape, etc.) by artistic representation or performance [...].

3. Absol. or intransitive. [...] spec. to act as an interpreter or dragoman.

'Almost all of my characters are translators', Lahiri asserts, and once again the figure of the interpreter is erased. To interpret, in its intransitive sense (above), however, is not the same as to translate. Although it may suggest movement, a carrying across, the metaphor of 'translating' cultural difference relies conceptually on fixed terms and on the spatial – just as literal translation involves a fixed written text rendered into another.²² This spatial insistence and the presence of fixed terms are to be found in the 'passage' to India or Forster's humorously named Bridge Party ('a party to bridge the gulf between East and West', *A Passage*, p. 24), but also in Spivak's static construction of her 'metropolitan' reader and inadequate author, and in her figuratively leading those she seeks to guide from a place of ignorance to one of correct understanding. My reading of Forster, Narayan, Lahiri and Spivak, however, points to a valorisation of the dialectical over the didactic. With the missing interpreter in mind, I suggest that metaphors relating to cultural difference which are drawn from 'translation' might be complemented by those drawn from Interpreting Studies, a field that has recently experienced its own cultural turn, and which is ready for (benign) co-option by other disciplines.

I offer the following characteristics of interpreting (primarily, though not exclusively, community or bilateral interpreting, since I am thinking of Mr Kapasi) as potential metaphoric conceptual 'tools' that might be used when working with 'culturally different' texts (and are

²⁰ Trivedi objects especially to Lahiri referring to herself as a translator ('I translate, therefore I am') because she is (in his eyes) monolingual. Lahiri has more recently chosen to write in Italian (see, for instance, *In altre parole*, 2015).

²¹ There are similarities here too with postcritical theory. See, for example, Felski's emphasis on 'composing, creating, coproducing'; her challenge to critical approaches which 'treat the text as an inert object to be scrutinized rather than a phenomenon to be engaged'. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 18 and p. 84.

²² This is not the case in other cultures, as Menon points out: 'In India, with its history of parallel oral and literary traditions, the word *translation* takes on different meanings'; a majority of the range of meanings in the Indian context emphasize temporality'. Menon, *Remapping*, p. 116.

not *all* texts culturally different, depending on where you are coming from?). Interpreting is oral, temporal and performative, non-iterative and evanescent (each rendition is both first and final). The parties involved are usually present to each other, their performance embodied: they read each other as well as speak; their emotions matter. The situation is dynamic; it unfolds in unexpected ways: the interpreter listens, then speaks, before listening again, but interruptions are possible, too. Voices may overlap and clash; the interpreter may need to intervene.

Returning to the classroom, since that is where this all began, it is worth considering who is best placed to occupy the figurative role of interpreter and between which or what culturally and linguistically embedded entities – students, teacher, texts – that interpreter is mediating. It means recognising that meaning(s) may be shape-shifting and evanescent but no less important for that, and recognising also how contingencies, needs and desires might affect the production of meaning. Finally, in the words of Cronin, it means remembering that 'power is everywhere in the definition, context and practice of interpreting' (Cronin, 46).

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Profs Peter Childs, Máire Ní Fhlathúin and Nicki Hitchcott for their feedback on a version of this article.

References

- Alam, Fakrul. 'Reading N K Narayan Postcolonially'. *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, vol. 21, nos 1–2, 1998, pp. 9–34.
- Angeletti, Claudia V. *Medical Interpreting and Cross-cultural Communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2004. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486616>
- Bassnett, Susan. 'Postcolonialism and/as Translation'. In Graham Huggan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 2013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588251.013.0022>
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Postcolonial Poetics: 21st-Century Critical Readings*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90341-5>
- Bradbury, Malcolm. 'Two Passages to India: Forster as Victorian and Modern'. In Malcolm Bradbury (ed.), *E. M. Forster. A Passage to India: A Casebook*. London: MacMillan, 1970, pp. 236–7.
- Brians, Paul. *Modern South Asian Literature in English*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003.
- Childs, Peter (ed.). *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.
- Cronin, Michael. 'The Empire Talks Back: Orality, Heteronomy, and the Cultural Turn in Interpretation Studies'. In Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler (eds), *Translation and Power*. Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.
- Featherstone, Simon. 'Passages to India'. *Cultural Survey*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1991, pp. 290–6.
- Felski, Rita. *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226294179.001.0001>
- Forster, E. M. *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin Books, 2005 [1924].
- Ghazvinizadeh, Susanna, 'E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* in Jhumpa Lahiri's Short Story, "Interpreter of Maladies"'. In Reena Mitra (ed.), *E. M. Forster's A Passage to India*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2008.
- Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203420102>
- Kanaganayakam, Chelva. 'How to Teach *The Guide* as a Culturally Different Text'. *Postcolonial Text* [online], vol. 1, no. 2, 2005.

- Kermode, Frank. 'The One Orderly Product'. In Malcolm Bradbury (ed.), *E. M. Forster. A Passage to India: A Casebook*. London: Macmillan, 1970.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *In altre parole*. Parma: Guanda, 2015.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. 'Interpreter of Maladies'. In Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*. London, Flamingo: HarperCollins, 1999.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. 'Interview with Jhumpa Lahiri'. Chicago Public Library. www.chipublic.org/interview-with-jhumpa-lahiri/.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. 'Narayan Days: Rereading the Master'. *Boston Review*, July/August 2006, bostonreview.net/archives/BR31.4/lahiri.php.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226470993.001.0001>
- Levine, June. 'Analysis of the Manuscripts of *A Passage to India*'. *PMLA*, vol. 85, no. 2, 1970, pp. 284–94. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1261403>
- Lewis, Simon. 'Lahiri's "Interpreter of Maladies"'. *Explicator*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2001, pp. 219–21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00144940109597148>
- Lowe, John. 'A Meeting in Malgudi: A Conversation with R K Narayan'. In Geoffrey Kain (ed.), *R. K. Narayan: Contemporary Critical Essays*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1993.
- MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
- Maxey, Ruth. 'Close Encounters with Ancestral Space: Travel and Return in Transatlantic South Asian Writing'. In R. Maxey, J. A. Piqueras and A. S. Cobos, *South Asian Atlantic Literature, 1970–2010*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 2011, pp. 77–118. DOI: https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_625260
- Menon, Nirmala. *Remapping the Indian Postcolonial Canon*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53798-0>
- Naipaul, V. S. *A Wounded Civilisation*. London: Andre Deutsch Ltd, 1977.
- Narayan, R. K. 'Reluctant Guru'. In Narayan, *A Writer's Nightmare*. Delhi: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Narayan, R. K. *The Guide*. London: Penguin Books, 2006.
- Narayan, R. K. 'When India was a Colony'. *New York Times*, 16 September 1984.
- Paranjape, Makarand. "'The Reluctant Guru": R. K. Narayan and *The Guide*'. *South Asian Review*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2003, pp. 170–86. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2003.11932307>
- Pathak, Zakia, Saswati Sengupta, and Sharmila Purkayastha. 'The Prisonhouse of Orientalism'. *Textual Practice*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1991, pp. 195–218. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502369108582112>
- Pöschhacker, Franz. *Introducing Interpreting Studies*. London: Routledge, 2016. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315649573>
- Pousse, Michel. *R. K. Narayan: A Painter of Modern India*. New York: Peter Lang, 1995.
- Prasad, G. J. V. 'Writing Translation. The Strange Case of the Indian English Novel'. In S. Bassnett & H. Trivedi, *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 41–57.
- Pym, Anthony. *Exploring Translation Theories*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Rajan, Gita. 'Ethical Responsibility in Intersubjective Spaces: Reading Jhumpa Lahiri's "Interpreter of Maladies" and "A Temporary Matter"'. In S. Lim, J. Gamber, S. Sohn and G. Valentino (eds), *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple U P, 2012, pp. 123–42.

- Shankar, Lavina Dhingra. 'Not Too Spicy: Exotic Mistresses of Cultural Translation in the Fiction of Chitra Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri'. In N. Iyer and B. Zare (eds), *Other Tongues: Rethinking the Language Debates in India*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009, pp. 23–53. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401206754_003
- Silver, Brenda. 'From "Periphrasis, Power and Rape in *A Passage to India*". In Peter Childs (ed.), *Post-colonial Theory and English Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 1999, pp. 363–76.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 'How to Read a "Culturally Different" Book'. In F. Barker, P. Hulme and M. Iverson (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, pp. 126–50.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 'The Burden of English'. In Breckenridge, Carol and Peter van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.
- Trivedi, Harish. 'Translating Culture vs Cultural Translation'. In St Pierre, Paul and Prafulla Kar. *In Translation: Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.71.27tri>
- Urieli, Natan. 'The Tourist Experience: Conceptual Developments'. *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 32, 2005, pp. 199–216. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2004.07.008>
- Urry, John, and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. London: Sage, 2011. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446251904>

How to cite this article: Hutton, MA 2020 Figuring the Guide in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Interpreter of Maladies', R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. *Modern Languages Open*, 2020(1): 4 pp. 1–14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/ml.o.v0i0.277>

Published: 05 March 2020

Copyright: © 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

]u[*Modern Languages Open* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Liverpool University Press.

OPEN ACCESS 