

## book review

### Shahnama in a Handy Translation

by Waheedul Haque

*There is nothing in the volume to indicate that it is a translation. Well, if the read isn't in Persian, then, of course, it must be such. Who are the translators? If that's immaterial, let it be. But has it been translated from the original Persian — as Maniruddin Yusuf had done? My hunch is it's a translation of an English translation. There was no harm in naming that source. The publishers wouldn't have given the present producers of this volume a hot chase for copyright dues.*

**M**Y HEART LEAPT UP WHEN I beheld a one-volume *Shahnama* in Bengali. The newly released translation had on cover something genuinely Persian. And that promised a truly sumptuous fare waiting inside. Instead it was disappointing all the way, from cover to cover.

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In the title page a university professor and a veteran journalist have jointly been named as editors. And in the whole volume one wouldn't find anything betraying an editor's discretion. The volume is wholly unedited, seen through to its publication by none other than very very incompetent proof readers.

Before the text begins there are certain appropriately editorial briefings such as a short preface that includes notes on the *Shahnama* and its author,



elements of the *Shahnama*, the contents of *Shahnama* and the character or characters or characteristics of *Shahnama*. This preface is followed by a six-page part titled editorial comments. All of these are translations from the scholarly writings of the editor or the editors of the English volume.

The publisher did a very bad thing of not crediting where the credit belongs. Very evidently the publisher hasn't put his heart into this job. Perhaps all he wanted was the translation of the text. And lo, here comes the dressings bringing all kinds of troubles. Another example of the publisher's indifferent handling of the volume lies in the tough going the text presents because of misprints both harrowing and hilarious.

Anyone who takes the pain of translating such ponderous classics, does our literature immense good without perhaps realising it fully. The present translation with all the dangers of being jaded and heavy lurking in the nature of the epic in its English abridged translation, which must have had been very forbidding going, — is, strangely, good, racy and in patches flashy. If only the volume had good planning and competent editors, it could be a good and mentionable addition to our literature.

The moral is: the publisher counts. He can do or undo anything headed to be printed. The best books of the world have seen the light of the day because there were publishers to back them, at times with risk. That the good books of the world are overwhelmingly outnumbered by the bad ones is again because bad publishers outnumber the good ones in equal measure.

## profile

### Words in the Clouds

by Jean Marc Dupuich

**J**EAN TARDIEU LIVES IN GERBERY, that beautiful village in the Oise department, full of roses. It is still Picardy, but it is already Normandy and the department is typical of the Paris area (Ile de France) after which a poem is named: "poplars, canals and palaces" or "fields of crops, meadows and forests". But Mr Tardieu was not born in Picardy, but in the Jura in the East of France.

In fact, he is neither from here, nor from over there, as a line reveals, "I was born beneath the big clouds". Naturally, being born so near the sky in the intimacy of cumulus and nimbus obviously leaves a mark on his personality, a sensation of floating and an ability to make metaphors: "I take my hat/it is an artichoke". He has an astonishing propensity to astonish: "surprised by my own presence", and a very sensible querying: "what should one say? What should one think?" There is an acute awareness of the passing of time and doubt, like a strong wind: I have learnt a lot/and heard everything/I have understood nothing and retained nothing".

With that, there is the coming to terms of the "good citizen of the universe" with the world as it is. "I am fond of red wine because it is red," but also as it could be: "I would be fond of red wine because it is white," which does not exclude a derisive dig, sometimes of fear, at death: I'll soon be in the frying pan/and it will mean farewell to good times."

On the matter of his country, it is enough to raise one's eyes skywards to realise that clouds do not have one, as they are always passing by. But Tardieu is "a cloud which speaks while dreaming". He speaks and wonders what it



Jean Tardieu

means and questions the sense of those sounds strung together in words and of the gestures which accompany them.

In fact, on the matter of a country, Jean Tardieu's is language. But then things get a bit complicated. Imagine that by dint of using vocabulary without really thinking about it or paying attention to it, suddenly, to inject some vitality into it, you decide to use "one word in place of another." You would then make the characters in your

pocket-theatre speak and the result would be something like this in the words of Irma, the maid: Madam, the postman has just worn out the fodder". It is quite: meaningless and yet everybody would understand since, at the same time as speaking, she would hand over the mail to her mistress who, taking it, would utter: "That's rind! Hanky very much!", before impatiently adding to Irma who has not budged, Well, my curl, Why are you landing there? You can sleeve off", and so on ...

— a radio man  
With the purpose of revealing the mask that words can be and in order to urge the reader to free himself from the mask he wears when uttering them, Monsieur Jean created "Monseigneur Monsieur". Monsieur and Monseigneur are identical, each is merely the shadow of the other. They speak together and their conversation is often metaphysical.

Excuse me, Sir, Sir, you are mistaken for disturbing you as I no longer have a head what a strange hat so how could I possibly have on your head! be wearing a hat? Jean Tardieu's mother had been a musician. Did he become so greatly interested in the tone and rhythm of the voice, out of love for her, and therefore give indications on the way that his poems should be read, comparable to the annotations on musical scores? For instance, "in a vile slandering tone" or "pompous, precise and dry, but accommodating." It must be said that, after being involved in the clandestine publications of the Resistance, on the Liberation he went to work for the French radio, which brought out a concern for the spoken word in this man of the written press.

— L'actualité En France

## book extract

### Accents of the Thunder

by Ahsanul Haque

*Dr Ahsanul Haque's Eliot on Eliot, reviewed recently by Dr Fakrul Alam in these pages under the title 'Making More and More Sense of T S Eliot' throws new light on many obscure and enigmatic passages in Eliot's writings. The book gives a fresh and more dependable view of the characters like Prufrock and Sweeney, the celebrated 'neo-classicism' of Eliot's poetry, the relationship between 'tradition' and 'the individual talent', the part that 'meaning' plays in poetry, etc. Here we reproduce a portion (adapted for publication in a magazine) from Eliot on Eliot, entitled 'Accents of the Thunder', which gives a radically new reading of the injunctions of the thunder in Part V of The Waste Land, described as a 'very interesting discussion of the triad' by Prof Frank Day of Clemson University (USA), done 'brilliantly' by Dr Serajul Islam Choudhury and 'exceptionally lucid and original' by Dr Narayan Chandran of Hyderabad University (India). Eliot on Eliot, published by Dhaka University (1996), contains 261 pages and is priced Tk 100.*

SINCE THE WASTE LAND GOT INTO PRINT in 1922, it seems to have enjoyed critical agreement on at least one point i.e. the three injunctions of the thunder in Part V are addressed to the same person: the protagonist — the speaker, at times an onlooker, and fitfully, a quester on an imagined spiritual journey. The supposition has enjoyed a long currency in spite of the fact that it is attended by many problems. The first stumbling block is that the supposed divine illumination succeeds only in further darkening the quester's path and leaving him in at least as much dismay as before with the final eruption of his perplexity in "Hieronymo's mad againe". In fact, the quester myth makes us blink quite a few significant facts and look for a drift of meaning which may not be there.

For a reconsideration of the issue, we should take a fresh look at the fable from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* on which the *Waste Land* passage is based. In the original fable, the exhortations of the thunder are to three different parties: they are but suggestions (not spelt beyond the first syllable) and are understood and accepted by the three categories of creatures as they evoke particular kinds of self-awareness and self-knowledge in them.

Another point to note is that while basing the passage on the fable from the *Brihadaranyaka*, Eliot rearranged the messages from "Damyata", "Datta" and "Dayadhvam" to "Datta", "Dayadhvam" and "Damyata" with some radical alterations in their meanings.

"Datta" which originally meant "give" is now made to signify "give" or "give yourself away"; "dayadhvam" now signifies "sympathize" instead of "be compassionate" and, farthest from the original, "damyata" now means "control" or "control another" instead of "control yourself".

In an approach to the significance of the passage one possibility that the injunctions of the thunder may have

been directed to three different parties in conformity with the original, has strangely enough, eluded all critics so far. But a careful analysis of the lines shows that the three messages are of three different tones and tempers and instead of being injunctions from above, they are likely to be, as in the original fable, responses from within — three different responses from three distinctly different kinds of mental make-up — and thus exposures of three different characters seeking self-knowledge and self-fulfilment.

The point may be elaborated a little further. The Lord Prajapati, in the original fable, does not, or has no time to, complete his instructions: but as soon as he utters the first syllable, each category of creatures betrays its nature by taking it to mean something appropriate to it and confessing what it needs to realize its fullest self. There is a possibility that the cryptic monosyllables of the thunder trigger off confessional trains of thought in the minds of three listeners with indications as to how they could fulfil their destiny.

Looked at from this angle, the first response to the "Da" of the thunder is from an emotion-charged nature vindicating what may be called the dictate of the blood. The ardour and impetuosity marked by phrases like "blood shaking my heart" and "the awful daring of a moment's surrender" indicate a supersensuous disposition which finds in the thunder's voice a sanction for self-surrender. The extreme impulsiveness and vehemence of this character is out of tune with most of Eliot and emphatically antithetical to the generic Eliot character from Prufrock to the Hollowmen and beyond. This distinctly un-Eliotic voice (better recognized as one of the different voices of Eliot-proposed original title *He Do the Police in Different Voices*) takes the first "Da", true to the listener's predilection, to be "Datta", meaning not "charity" of the original, but "giving oneself away". The

obvious implications of "sexual consent" (Hugh Kenner), seen from a stricter point of view as "sexual indiscretion" (David Ward), or even "sexual blunder" (Grover Smith), cannot be accommodated to the typically Eliotic disposition which presently comes to the fore in the reverberations of the second "Da".

The image of the room and the locked door, the faint resolution and the immediate relapse in the next passage is a classic exposition of the Eliotic situation. The Bradleyan quotation in Eliot's note, summing up a philosophy so akin to his, to which he devoted several years of doctoral research, is the best doctrinal formulation of this kind of existence. "Sympathize", evidently, "with your fellow beings", instead of "be compassionate (to weaker creatures)" in the original, may be taken as the best instruction for getting out of the prison house of the "finite centre" of the individual self. One big problem, generally overlooked, underlying the supposition that the first two messages are addressed to the same protagonist, is that the very imperious "give yourself away" subsumes and far supersedes the subdued and circumspect "sympathize" (its tentative initial force presently fizzling out in inaction and retrogression).

The third response differs from the preceding two in a significant way. Instead of the first person "we" ("what have we given?") or "I" ("I have heard the key"), it resorts to second person "you" ("your heart would have responded") and instead of the speaker's own reaction, there is the vicarious awareness of somebody else's. The other person, in the identification of D W Harding, is of the female sex, made explicit by the image of a boat under a helmsman. "Damyata", originally meaning "control yourself", now means "control another person", the word "control" appearing in the emphatically specific combination of "controlling hands".

An intriguing aspect of this expository passage is the use of the past conditional tense in "would have

responded" ("would have" later added to simple "responded" in the original manuscript) which implies, as pointed out by Harding, "an irrevocably lost opportunity". While the navigational image may have derived from Eliot's early interest in yachting, the regret for a missed chance can be traced further back to Eliot's childhood experience of the rose garden. The core of the incident being detailed in "Dans le Restaurant", the situation seems to have inspired some earlier (such as "La Figlia") and later (as some passages in *Four Quartets*) verses of Eliot. Harding again points rightly to the lines in "Burnt Norton" which prelude the rose-garden passage, employing incidentally, the same past conditional tense:

If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.  
What might have been is an  
abstraction  
Remaining a perpetual possibility  
Only in a world of speculation.  
What might have been and what has  
been  
Point to one end, which is always  
present.

adding that in *The Waste Land* "What might have been is still a matter of self-reproach", in plainer words, the speaker admits that "her heart would have responded if he had been able to offer an effective invitation."

The response to the third "Da" — presumably from a female entity, as we have seen, could also be in the first person as the preceding two. But through an abrupt lover-beloved transposition comparable to the narrator-lover transposition in "La Figlia" ("So I would have had him leave, / So I would have had her stand and grieve" followed unexpectedly by "I should find ... Some way we both should understand" — a result of what Hugh Kenner calls "doubling of consciousness"), the lover records the thoughts of the beloved towards him: as in "Burnt Norton", conversely.  
My words echo

Thus, in your mind.  
The remark of Kristian Smidt on the insufficient detachment between the observer and the agent — sufferer in "La Figlia" applies to the "Damyata" situation also: "The general effect... is of something intermediate between objective description and personal confession."

A mood of guilt and remorse (which connects easily with the situation of the male partner just discussed) affects the lines following without a break in the original drafts:

I left without you  
Clasping empty hands.  
(apologetic "empty hands" offering a sharp contrast to deft "controlling hands") — some of the few lines deleted from the draft of this section which needed, according to Eliot, "Little or no retouch", most probably because of their overtly confessional tone.

The situation, therefore, is not one of three divine exhortations, complementary and concerted, directed to the same person, but one of three conflicting and clashing points of view — their incompatibility reducing the protagonist to his most abject and despairing self:

I sat upon the shore  
Fishing, with the arid plains behind me.

It is cool consolation that the arid plain is now "behind", as the image is a variant of "a desolate sunset" and all that follow add up to an encompassing gloom.

The next line "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" with the manuscript variant "Can I at least, etc." implies a desperate last attempt; and, alongside "my lands", the variants "my kingdom" and "my own lands" suggest the protagonist's residue of hope lying in working out his own destiny apart from others. A satisfactory resolution of the problem resulting from a synthesis of all three points of view being simply beyond his reach

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down — a line set apart from the preceding and following

passages in the original drafts as well as the first published version to mark the finality of the statement.

The three heterolingual quotations in the next passage illustrating Eliot's attempt to see not only "the pastness of the past, but of its presence", that is, the timeless quality of his theme, again seem to relate to two male characters and one female. The line from *Inferno* is a speech of one whose unchecked propensities (the indiscreet self-surrender?) landed him in his present plight and that from Nerval's "El Desdichado" shows the situation of a man in sheer isolation and despair. The quotation from the late Latin "Pervigilium Veneris", meaning "when shall I be like the swallow" (completed with the clause "that I may cease to be silent") expresses Philomela's desire to acquire the "inviolable voice" following her rude violation.

Allowing for the undeniable obscurity Eliot sometimes takes refuge in, the multilingual quotations may be seen somehow to connect with the three of the already mentioned *dramatis personae* as the summing up of their diverse stances in age-old poetic rendering. One is the recognizable generic Eliot character: the broken Coriolan or the prince of the broken tower, in distressing isolation. Another is of indiscreet emotional impetuosity, put somehow in the context of a state beyond death (note references to the obituary and the purgatorial fire). The third is the wistful female character represented as a vessel to be piloted or a bird to be drawn out into a song. The "voices" of the original title of the poem "He Do the Police in Different Voices", coming in the quotes through different languages too — the only fragments the protagonist can now shore against his ruins — and juxtaposed without coherence, leave Hieronymo "mad againe". Further probing into these obscure indications will have little illumination from the protagonist — the bitten-off tongue ruling out any further communication.