

Ye firnah admī kī khānāh-e virānī ko kyā kam hai
hu'e tum dost jis ke, dushman uskā āsmān kyōn ho?¹

When you set out to mischief you ravage my home,
why bother with the sky as an enemy, with you as a friend?

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Lyrical Moments, Historical Hauntings:
On Gender, Colonialism, and Desire
in Miraji's Urdu Poetry

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3. MIRAJI'S RESPONSE TO THE PROGRESSIVES

What was Miraji's relationship to the Progressives? Where is he placed, and how? When these questions were posed in Chapter 2, Miraji was situated in a position of privileged marginality. That is, he was read into the dominant twentieth-century Urdu tradition as a "troublesome" member, even though his interaction with it was not consistent over his thirty years of literary activity.

When he first sauntered onto the literary scene of Lahore in the early 1930s, Miraji was considered a young, rising star, an avid advocate of the Urdu avant-garde.² But the Progressives were also emerging as a literary force, and as they began to accumulate influence and demarcate the arena of literary activity and mediate value, Miraji, along with other writers, was relegated to the margins of the Urdu literary world. Although measures (*m'aiyār*) had been set up to cull the so-called "normative" literary community and the canon created by the Progressives, the system proved permeable. Works that were antithetical to the new norms for literary and critical activity like Miraji's poetry or Manto's short stories continued to be produced even as the norms were being put in place, thereby providing the impetus to create yet more controls on the new canon that were specifically formed to fit the characteristics of the works of the authors who were being marginalized.

MIRAJI AND THE PROGRESSIVES

Some of Miraji's ties to the Progressives can be seen in his language. He deployed the same root vocabulary and accepted the preeminence of certain terms while writing literary history and criticism—"change," "newness," "progress" (*tabdīl, jadīdiyāt, taraqqī*)—but he deliberately enmeshed them in his own iconoclastic explorations, against the way they had been applied by other literary critics. Nevertheless, he did not disengage himself from the common, accepted literary language and, like other writers whose works exceeded the scheme of controls that accompanied their production, he continued to operate within its limits. Miraji also shared with the Progressives structural elements in the story they both told of their literary pasts, coalitions between history and modernity, and the iconography for representing the "past" or "tradition." Both Miraji and the Progressives materialize time synecdochally to figure a relationship with it. For example, the most obvious concatenations between Miraji and certain narratives written by Progressives, like Raipuri, is that they both anthropomorphized the ghazal and feminized it when it was used to represent the past literary tradition. Through this allegorical and therefore bodied past, ghazal as sumptuously ornamented beloved, Miraji and Raipuri ventured over the limen of desire where the body of writing fields its attractions and repulsions to a feminized past.

Some of the differences between Miraji and the Progressives lie in Miraji's particular resignification of key terms he shares with the Progressives. His essay on new poetry, "Nayī shā'irī kī buniyādeñ" (The fundamentals of new verse),³ opens:

Some people have begun to call free verse in Urdu new verse. I am not among them. Some people, coming at free verse through its content [topics]—women and workers—have begun to call that free verse. It's as though life's political, economic, or sexual aspects in their view are the unformed issues of new poetry. I don't say this either. I believe that even if it is written in meter, lyric can be considered free verse if it shuns noisy effects and is constructed to describe, think about, or express some issue. A new poet is someone who extricates himself from the bonds of convention to create his personhood [poetic self] by revealing a feeling-thought or a desire.

The above paragraph illustrates the rhetorical strategies Miraji used in his work. He wrapped himself, his use of a term, his particular reading of a poem, in other uses or readings. These gestures of inclusion served to draw in readers with assumptions different than his, and once they had been enticed, to convince them of the validity of his own view by showing them that his use of certain terms was much more broad-based than others. The contrast between readings showed off his use or his reading. According to this portion of *shā'irī*, other proponents of new verse see it either in terms of a single formal shift that released meter and rhyme from previous constraints, or in terms of a formal shift that released verse to explore new topics, like women and workers. Promulgators of new verse (the Progressives) believed that through these topics certain "life" issues could be explored.

As Miraji begins to lay out his own position—"In my view"—he gives readers strategies for judging previous opinions. In the next two sentences, when he says that his kind of new poet "abandons noisy or vocal effects" and "extricates himself from . . . conventions," he leads the reader around again to recollect the examples he gave them of poets created by prior critics, who are then read as merely interested in provoking controversy (*hañgāmāh*) while mired in the conventional. His definition of new poetry is poetry that blends feeling and thought to completely express what goes on inside a person—"a feeling-thought or desire"—and suits form and language to the issue at hand. Such a poet, rather than resorting to the conventionality of the formal to assess his affiliations to newness and thus to the measures of value, turns form to his own use.

The differences I have outlined between Miraji and some of the mainline 1930s Progressives are structured around their relative positions to dominant modes of reading. It is clear that Miraji was marginalized through the way he was read. During his lifetime he had to confront readings of his work by mainline Progressives as "obscene poetry"; he had to provide other readers an alternative framework within which it could be read—not just to create alternative readings but to be read at all. By laying out the ground for new practices of reading, Miraji tried to pry open a space in which his poetry could be read as other than obscene.

Because my limited time in India made it difficult for me to collect all of my own material from writers in Bombay, I commissioned my mother

to conduct some interviews for me. She came back with the tapes, a slightly embarrassed cast to her face. I asked her what was bothering her and she said hesitantly, as though afraid I would be angry, that she'd been asked why her daughter was writing on this poet: his poetry was so sexual, so obscene. People did not stop giving me or my mother information, however, despite the question she had been faced with; in fact I think they were even more helpful once they found I was serious. But what the incident made abundantly clear was the charged significance of certain judgments. I asked my mother whether she'd been given examples of Miraji's poetry to support the accusation, but realized even as I asked her that the use of a word like "sexual" in front of her, a sedate-looking, middle-class housewife, was an automatic conversation stopper; it was such a scandalous charge that she could not retaliate with repartee. Were the interviews not being conducted for me, she would not have, as she did, continued them. She certainly would not have gone out of her way to read Miraji's poetry once she heard that it was "sexual." I read her some poems and talked them over with her, discussed multiple significations and readings, but felt unsatisfied.

Calling a poem "sexual" was a way of taking it out of literary circulation, turning it into the provenance of aficionados shielded by their professional knowledge, and perverts. Calling a poem sexual relegated it to the domain of the legal and psychological in the present, or the domain of what ought to have been forgotten, from the past. Once something was labeled "sexual" it also stopped the reading dead, as I discovered when I asked poets questions about optional readings of such poems. They simply weren't interested, and took recourse in tautology: the poem was obscene because it was sexual and it was "just sexual" therefore it was obscene. It brought home to me the absolute necessity Miraji faced of creating reading strategies that would slip out of those provided for his poetry by the Progressives. It also brought into view the circularity of the assigning value, where the terms of assessment were the assumptions on which value was based.

When I reread Miraji's essay on new verse in the context of my recent experiences and his own critical piece analyzing his poem "Picnic in the Jungle" (in *Is nazm meñ*), it became clear that a part of *New Verse's* agenda was indeed to provide readers with strategies for reading. In their solicitous mindfulness to the features of each poem, and in their deployment of analytic frameworks suited to each poem's concerns, Miraji's readings differed from the dominant ones endorsed by the Progressives. Translation,

too, became very important for Miraji as he rendered a range of poets from Baudelaire to Li Po. These other poets gave Urdu readers alternatives to their own canon as well as access to the conventional Western canon that was the tool kit of affiliations with which every recipient of English education was equipped.

A concern Miraji shared with the Progressives was their common understanding of audiences, both readers and listeners, as protean. In order to speak about reorienting poetry to attract and attend to the needs of new audiences, or to infer that differently composed audiences were making new sets of demands on writers, as both Miraji and Ansari did, they assumed that audiences changed with different historical circumstances. Ansari's protean audiences, whose taxonomies were determined by their economic resources, needs, and their relationship to capital, changed over time from "traditional" royal elite patrons of Sanskrit *kāvya* and the ghazal and the plebeian, humbler audience of bhakti poetry, to the homogeneous proletarian or the homogenous middle-class ones of the 1930s. In Miraji's work this schema transmuted into a more complex notion of multiple audience perspectives (*naẓariyah*). Although Miraji never sifts out audience response as an independent category of literary criticism, in many of his essays that were close readings of single contemporary poems, particularly those in *Is nazm meñ*, he wends his way through several reading options before arriving at his own, and his rhetoric of persuasion is directed at those other readings.⁴

In *Is nazm meñ*, Miraji assesses changes in canon formation in response to the shifting desires of different audiences. In his discussion of poetry written prior to the twentieth century, rather than saying that the production of poetry was affected by audiences, he said that he saw audiences influence the assimilation of poetry into a mainstream. So, for Miraji, poetry that did not fit the canon had always been produced. His explanation for why it was not included in the canon at the time of its production is that people did not have the requisite tools for reading it. Tools that were available might bend under the pressure of political shifts, or transmute as the poem was transported to new places. And eventually, even a poem that had once been transparently readable might turn opaque. As audiences were reconstituted (including the Progressives as an audience) they made different demands, read with different presuppositions and biases, and assembled new languages of criticism. With a change in audience, the kind of poetry

that was canonized, including poetry that made up the canon from another time or another place, might be transformed.

Miraji's depiction of shifts in audience response looks at audiences not as solipsistic and self-generating but, like the Progressives' analysis of the same phenomena, as produced and refigured under sociopolitical constraints.⁵ Literary universes were, for him—as for the Progressives—contingent upon extraliterary events. Under the influence of British rule, shifts in socioeconomic power from Muslim courts to British-dominated institutions opened up the control of Urdu culture that had been, until then, the provenance of the courts. According to Miraji, this moved the audience from a carefully demarcated and patrolled urban court culture to one that was more broad-based. As a member, however marginal, of an elite cadre who defined the canon, he and his compatriots couldn't question or even see that even if the audience had expanded, a cadre no more egalitarian than the old court culture still made the canonical choices and formulated the codes for reading poetry.⁶

Since Miraji chooses a range of sometimes incompatible writers upon which to comment, and tailors readings to the writer's piece, even if he came up with his version of an apposite reading for a poem in his show-and-tell readings, his appraisals could never be threaded easily into a unitary strand, nor could the reading frameworks he uses. The modes he deployed include, for example, reading through gendered colonial desire, through collisions and collusions of genre, through historical materialist analyses. In this refusal to come up with a single reading or grid he is very different from the Progressives. As the Progressive movement gathered steam and was regularized and ordered, it set itself to create a uniform frame of reference for writing, as well as reading, poetry and prose. As a result, everyone (including Miraji) who did not fit the frame was marginalized from *the* literary culture. When Miraji appears to create a unitary position for himself, in those moments when he signifies contested concepts like "progress" and "newness," the position he creates is quite clearly a position that he sees as peculiar to himself rather than as a definition for an entire movement. So he still leaves open the possibility that others might hold antagonistic or just different opinions than him.

As a member of a group of literati who wrote and worked as both literary and political figures, Miraji operated at the limits of both the local and pan-Indian discourses about politics as well as literature. With very

little money, Miraji was economically marginal; also in both the literary and economic modes through which he has been constructed and elided, Miraji simultaneously fell into the category of "subaltern."⁷ Aijaz Ahmad, who has written a hegemonic frame narrative about Miraji—the narrative one is referred to, albeit with certain reservations about its "Freudian slant," when one investigates Miraji—portrays him either as chameleon "subaltern," self-consciously configured between a range of stereotypical male "subaltern" roles, or as constantly shifting between personae. Although, when he published his article "Miraji: Personality and Work" in *Saverā* (Dawn) Ahmad would not have used the term "subaltern" on Miraji, and possibly might not use it as a designation had he written the article more recently, I think it is worth noting that Ahmad does use the descriptive categories of laborer, yogi, and sadhu on Miraji. Ahmad's categories are formed at the intersection of the signifiers of economic status and the signifiers of dislocation based on medical, psychological, and criminal taxonomies, as well as on earlier rules for cataloguing poetic personae. Since I do not wish to take it on here, I have also left intact in my statement above the problematic designations of and juxtaposition of constructed, fictive personalities and a "real," "authentic" "self" that Ahmad maintains in his analysis of Miraji's "personality."

I would like to propose here that, through rewriting work attributed to Miraji and the space he occupied in relation to a group of intellectuals, the categories of indigenous colonial groups Guha proposed were always in slippage. The way he configured himself with respect to them and the language in which he was read by them were not completely visible or contained within the parameters set up by a particular political polemic. This polemic still informs literary discourse and the language of historiography.⁸ So, too, the narratives of resistance were not visible when read through this polemic.

MIRAJI'S PROSE

As I look at writings by Miraji, I will address discursive formations, stretching the language in which he wrote to account for its materialization into other fields, and will offer some conclusions about how the pieces respond to the circumstances that attended their production or appearance.

Discursive formations are important for two reasons. This kind of project is particularly appropriate for critics like Miraji who focus on the language—linguistic formations and literary lineages—of contemporaries and the ways in which these were unwittingly hedged in by established modes of speaking and assigning value. Furthermore, discursive formations are places where the power of the state is inadvertently vested and displayed through representations of it. In the case of Miraji's essays, the representations of the state, of the community in relation to the state, and of self-representations are those exchanged or circulated within a community that, in this particular mode, is not overtly, directly, or primarily responsive to colonial demands.⁹ What this kind of analysis opens to view are the spaces where effects of the power of a colonial state or an affirmative ideology appear to be concealed, not just as complicated narratives in which the state figures but in an iconography of tropes through which the descriptions of the state have become naturalized. In Miraji's work, the representations of the state as an agent of Progressive modernization are undercut by his representation of the condition of his literary community. His description of his community as one marked by profound uncertainty and powerlessness conflicts with and contradicts the clichéd valorization of the state. These two narratives do not run in tandem, but disrupt one another.¹⁰

By the time of Miraji's death, the bulk of his prose had been marginalized in an Urdu canon controlled by the Progressives. The reception of his work, its evaluation, the interpretation of specific poems, and the reciprocities between his prose writings and poetry were affected by the complex interaction of his work with the policies and interpretative responses of the Progressives who dominated the literary scene toward the end of his life and for about twenty years after his death.¹¹ Miraji's entire oeuvre, as has already been indicated, was shaped and shorn by critics to fit a biography in which he appeared as a drunk, dissolute poet whose narcissistic desire disengaged him from political activity. Read through the valences of this biographizing and a set of particular categories for exclusion and inclusion with measures and rules for political engagement to which these essays did not all conform, marginalization resulted even within Miraji's opus. The parameters for inclusion relied on a materialist language of political engagement, one that asked for an explicit critique of the material

conditions—economic and political—of the colonial situation. Since Miraji did not write exclusively in this language, his critique of the discourse of his literary political milieu was considered apolitical; he was thought of as speaking in “purely aesthetic” and transcendental categories—as providing merely a reverie on the condition of modern “Man”—and was, thus, defanged. Even when he was rejuvenated in the work of critics and poets like Wazir Agha or N. M. Rashid, the terms of his rejuvenation never question the reading of him as apolitical. The work discussed here will be mediated by my reading of him, which, as a counterpoint to earlier readings, will concentrate on his essays as work that explores the compromised conditions of literary production in a colonial universe, and which offer occasionally subversive rewritings of certain facets of this production.

Since I will be looking primarily at narratives, the forms collusion and subversion take are discursive ones. I address the narratives as both compromised by the neocolonial representations of the state and resistant to precisely those representations, so there is no pristine set of representations in which an uncompromised dominant position is possible.¹² All of Miraji's work, and particularly that which I discuss here, is impressed by the profound ambivalence that marks similar literary artifacts produced under colonial conditions. Moments of subversion and resistance are constantly folded into, among other things, the iconography of the representation of the colonial state. This iconography is shaped by colonial justifications of their continued and “necessary” presence in India and by the rhetoric of Progressive modernization under the aegis of British rule.¹³ I will also treat some of his essays as pieces of discursive subversion directed at the implicit rather than the explicit terms of engagement with colonialism: at hegemones, at the places of naturalization where people had come to believe in something as plainly true, at those places where desires coagulated. In most of the essays he wrote, Miraji did not explicitly critique the colonial state; rather, some of his critique was directed at the modes through which his own literary contemporaries had come to speak a language in a way that now seemed ordinary—by repetitively imitating the semiotics, genres, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax associated with British writers.

Miraji asked his contemporaries to self-reflexively engage and confront their relationship with and connections to British codes in terms of what they wrote and how they wrote, and not to blindly emulate or imitate what

they thought the British did.¹⁴ In addition, he attempted to disengage his contemporaries from a set of filiative literary authorities that were exclusively British and to provide for them alternative literary figures as references and affiliative networks.¹⁵

The context he provided for the alternative networks—the act of writing on and of translating the work of various men and women poets, thereby introducing into the Urdu canon figures who had not been available in the same way prior to his production—is one piece of a performance of discursive resistance. In the process, Miraji rewrote what he targeted as the authorizing canon or canon of authorities for Urdu literature.¹⁶ His irregular affiliative lineages, traveling through male and female writers, ravaged filiations as patrimonial property lines that inhered in the past constructed as it was up to that point.¹⁷ His translations highlighted *translation* as a colonial apparatus aimed at reeducation, and his essays displayed historical consciousness as a technology that refined/sieved historical remembering through repudiation and forgetting.

THROUGH THE LYRIC TO MYTH AND HISTORY: *AFSĀNE, SHĀ'IRĪ AUR TĀRĪKH*

A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the “eternal” image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called “once upon a time” in historicism’s bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history.¹⁸

In the essay considered below, “Nayī shā'irī kī buniyādeñ,” Miraji disentangled himself from other critics who shared the criteria of “newness” as a basis for assigning value to a literary project. “Newness” in this essay became the badge of honor awarded when a poem fit the criteria for inclusion in the canon. Though Miraji attempted to draw lines between himself and others on how he assessed his contemporaries and tallied up their newness, he had to first seduce the people he saw as his interlocuters. But the diversions of enticement he ventured were not simple, for he too be-

lieved at least a little in what he tried to distance himself from. And though the rhetoric his contemporaries might have used was sternly proper, the pull of fiction and lyric moved them to create improper things. They, like Miraji, created things anointed as new, but with allegiances that ran contrary to assignments of value. As Miraji wrote to them, for them, and to entice them, he slipped and slid like them as he fashioned the dense webbing that wove together new and old; past, present, and future; history and historical materialism; the things to be kept, things to be left, and things to be consigned to a future that may or may not ever come.

Newness can rise like a phoenix from the ashes of the old. It can reappear time and again as time recycles itself. It can glow suddenly out from the past as the past curves forward and back. It can be held in abeyance for a future promised and always awaited, never quite delivered. It can be a missive misdirected to an unknown address. It can materialize as nostalgia’s ghost. All these show up in Miraji’s corpus. Many of them resonate with his elaborations here.

THE FABULOUS STORIES: *AFSĀNE AUR HIKĀYAT*

Miraji’s descriptions of and exhortations to the audience for Urdu literature engage facets of the narratives he writes for his world. In his essays he writes out three parallel tales, moving from the mythic to the historical. The stories are culled from three different portions of the essay on new verse and form the bulk of it.¹⁹ They are framed in discussions of words central to Urdu literary discourse and literary judgment: newness (*nayī*), change (*tabdīl*), and Progressive (*taraqqī*). The stories are as follows:

1. *The Myth*

New forms, new topics, new gestures of speaking—in new lyric their arrival is intimately bound up, in a certain way, with the wants of the inside and the urgencies of the outside.

The needs of the first humans were limited. Therefore, their poetry walked on the same limited paths. Let’s say that their sight could seek poetics within the circle of their necessities. Filling his stomach, he

[the first man] found pleasure in moments of forgetfulness/repose with his *hamdam shabānah* [soul-mate night (feminized)], collecting food to fill his stomach and feel fear. Fear of the *maẓābir-e fiṭrat* [spectacles of nature] and fear of *hamjins* [own species (masculinized)] enemies. These were the very things that birth the stuff of poetry. For the first humans poetry was the intermediary space stretched out between the parallel lines of desire and fear. As they [humans] traveled through stages of progress, and as they acquired the means for civilization and housing, the star of human imagination [*takḥayyul*] spread, flying in its own splendor, and from its ignited dust/cinders, became the Milky Way in a sky of thought. The arrival of civilization and housing didn't just offer a kind of literary satisfaction given through desire and attraction, but after this moment the intellect began traveling on every kind of creative and uncreative path, and at the same time began to wonder about which point he [the intellect] would make his next destination.

2. *The Fable (Mediating Narrative)*

Art is the interpreter/translator [*tarjumān*] of many identities. And identities put life on display. It is evident that our life these days definitely changes, if not every month, then every year. . . .

Today, science's inventors have brought each thing close to every other thing. But human beings have been separated from each other. It's as though the previous blinding facts [*ānkh ojal vāli bāt ab nahin rahī*] are no longer viable. But the straightforwardness necessary for knowing one another, the depth of which is no longer possible to achieve, is not in our constitutions, or at the very least is disappearing. This is the reason why art, while coming closer to life, also remains distant from it. This was also how it was in the past. But it had another form. In the past, a bed of flowers had been spread out for a long time on the consecrated ground of the royal household of Urdu poetry. A beautiful woman [*sundarī*] was sitting on it, adorned [*singār*] with sixteen pieces of jewelry. The people who lived in the simile fanned her with the fly-whisks of metaphor. The people who strolled in and out of the palace were the few hand-picked men who were able to fire up their hearts and bathe their eyes in the beautiful splendor of that restless radiant woman. Not just anyone had the courage to enter

this formidable, aloof, and untouchable gathering. Only the courageous were emboldened by courtliness to enter the royal gathering: they were those versed in the niceties of literature, and only they could utter the proper sounds of praise when they listened to others; only they could go there. . . .

After this, a besieging storm crossed the seven seas and arrived. The hurricane of Western culture, organization, and education struck. It picked up dried twigs and leaves. But in its glory it also brought rain to help new buds sprout. Now, slowly, new voices could be heard.

Some said: art should be brought closer to life.

Some said: we cannot carry goods over from our assets.

Some spoke out and said: we know only two things—purity and integrity.

And the commotion of each kind of music created turbulence. New waves seethed out of the turbulence. Which [the waves] produced new stages for life's journey. But whose smokiness is like a forgetfulness. The sort of forgetfulness in which only a few [people] can see the right road and travel on it.

This was the quality of the new poetry of the time. And the new poet stands at a crossroads from which many roads leave, to the right, to the left, to the front, and to the back. But he doesn't really know which road he has picked. What importance the experiences of the past have for him. For how long he has to stand this way. . . .

The old supports on the basis of which people passed their entire lives in the dilemmas of a domestic existence no longer remain with him. He is now all alone and on a quest for help. Sometimes he imagines the wrong things as a support. Sometimes even when he reaches a real support, he doesn't know what happened. And the main reason for this is when a new edifice has to be adorned, it must be poured into a new mold.

3. *The History*

The causes of this upheaval were located in the murky time of 1857. When for the first time, the connections between social and political norms were splintered and space created for new codes. Let's say that a gap of a few generations had already formed between new young poets

and the older generations. They [older generations] saw that time of intellectual turmoil as a pulse.

But history and genealogical memory come together and make the time of its past its experience. Other than this, a person's intelligence is made up from its fusion with the past and future. The past molds his basic affairs. The future investigates each movement it makes, and those aspirations become intentions, reach fruition in the future, and make its identity visible.

When we bring the past of today's poets before us, from a political perspective, then, along with the suppressed ideas which emerge out of the complete desecration of the local government, we see elements which augment the life of new political movements. These were the strong repressions of the first downfall. They took on a political cast and, at odds with the entire fabric of the country, gave birth to new aspirations and created a desire for progress and freedom in all walks of life.

When we look at the life of a poet from a social perspective, we see more than one thing taking place. New education came even as the distances in the cities were closed. And the frog in the well began to think that there was life outside his species and his society. Which was an unyielding space that, because of its intensity, twisted earlier ideas. Education and commerce introduced him to new presences. And the map of a domestic existence began to be erased. Far away from his home he began to feel the dimensions of alienation. That feeling spread in every direction. . . . Superficiality became the norm, and a lack of responsibility grew. New, young poets began to write. But the desire to write the kind of poetry that one needs knowledge for, came later.

These three stories intertwine in various ways. The mythic story is a generic description of the movements of modernization. The players in the myth are human beings and the events that occur in the story generic events are dehistoricized and divorced of cultural details. The historical narrative is located in Miraji's own world, the world of urban Urdu literati. In the essay on new poetry, the shift from myth to history is mediated through a story of the violent impact of the British, "the hurricane of Western culture, organization, and education," on Miraji's cultural uni-

verse. The mediating story or historical fable provides the liaison between interactions described in terms of a ubiquitous person residing in a universal/abstract community and his responses to his world, and one that describes the history of shifts enacted by a particularly constituted community rendered in detail. All three stories tell of the movement in a literary tradition and the outgrowth of new literary forms, and all three locate the causes for the movement in (re)formations of the *socius*. The three—myth, fable, and history—map onto one another, and in their reiteration of similar trajectories within differently depicted contexts, read as allegories of each other. Mapping the three stories onto one another as mutual allegorical conceits weaves them together, so that they cannot be easily isolated, one from another, to establish Benjamin's separation between the historical (as fable) and the historical materialist (as history): between "the 'eternal' image of the past" and a "unique experience of the past."

This shift, from myth to history, both substantiates the validity of each kind of narrative and disturbs the privilege or prestige of any one—each story must have the others to survive and be read. The history makes specific, iterating in historical time and moving into the present moment of Miraji's literary circumstances, the generic mythos of "humankind." The myth endorses the historical descriptions by underpinning the historical and moving it into the dimension of the timeless or into the places of out-of-time. But this dichotomization of history and myth is disordered by the way the myth is read. The myth ought to be a shared story of a community that tells its origins, but is instead read as Miraji's peculiarly personal "specific" account of human concerns. The historical narrative, which could have been read as Miraji's own retelling of his time, becomes "generic" and the point of convergence for commonalities between him, his audience, and the knotted place of common cultural tale-telling. The juxtaposition of mythic and historical pulls the historical into the mythic, so the historical narrative, too, becomes a form of cultural tale-telling, a collective fiction that relies on nodal points of information whose veracity would have to be taken on faith and are a part of a body of exchanged and shared beliefs. The imbrication of myth and history offered a counterclaim to James Mill's earnestly believed proposition that the mythic and the historical must be kept apart, and that the separation between them constituted the truly modern sense of the historical.²⁰

The residue from the myth Miraji tells, disengaged from the historical narrative that accompanies it, becomes one of the modes through which Miraji's work is read. N. M. Rashid, in an interview with Carlo Coppola, said of Miraji: "He calls him (Man) back to Nature where his primitive self used to be. . . . His poetry symbolizes the eternal quest of Man . . . for the discovery of the lost self."²¹ Rashid's analysis of Miraji's project is problematic, because in it he sees Miraji's work functioning in an entirely different discursive and symbolic space from that of Miraji's contemporaries, and thus not political. But Rashid's analysis is useful for a reader like me, because it demarcates the theoretical place in critical writing in and on Urdu literature that is both apolitical and perceived as "belonging" to Miraji, as Miraji's provenance, and as identified with him.²² Critical positions like Rashid's, which lose or forget the body of Miraji's essay, so that they can remember it metonymically, only through one part, are ironic precisely in relation to what the stories venture. The entire prose piece could be thought of as a kind of voyage of loss and memory, toward loss and about loss, where loss becomes an ambivalent form of liberation in another key.

The three stories map onto one another in several ways. They share plot fixtures and transformatory elements that echo or draw upon a particular narrative of change. Like the neo-Victorian companionate marriage fantasy that continues to underwrite fictional and polemical narratives about family relationships in the new modern of early-twentieth-century South Asia, a "narrative of change" is the structural fixture on which histories are built. In Miraji's essays this "narrative of change" displays archetypal patterns that conform to the exigencies of colonial circumstances. But these patterns are modulated by the context in which they appear. And unlike most narratives of change scripted for a colonized world they do not possess a moral telos.

Temporality takes curious turns in the three stories. In the first and the second stories its apparition is not as historical time. Rather it is embedded in space, embedded into the architectures of transformation, told in images that toll the movement of time. In the third story temporality begins to be spoken as date, as 1857, the date of a rupture, haunted by the bodies that died in war. This is the conventionalized representation of historical time. Into it is folded the possibility of sequences that date: of dates that render events, locate them, and spatialize them.

All the narratives are bipolar, bisected into disjunctive halves organized

around change. The first half is the "past" of the story, and the second the "present." The two portions are bound to each other through the moment of transformation or the point at which change begins to occur. The details in the second half of each narrative are constituted through that change.

In the next section of this chapter, I will look at the myth, the mediating narrative, and the history, to see what forms the patterns take in both the first and second part of each narrative. In the process, I will also examine the various tropes that are deployed in the writing of each narrative.

THE PAST: "ONCE UPON A TIME"

In the first portion of each narrative Miraji describes the originary moment of the story—the moment when the story starts is the "once upon a time" section of each. Here Miraji lays out the concepts that define the "past" for him. This part of each story is configured spatially rather than temporally. It is not described as a series of time-bound transitions but rather as a theater in which a set of repeating transactions takes place. The space forms a closed system pared down to the bare necessities of an endlessly circulating, fixed pattern of transactions between a predetermined cast of actors. The system is self-generating and solipsistic. The location of each theatric engagement provides the conventions, props, and actors for it. All three are located in "natural" sites: the mythic in a generic "state of nature," the mediating narrative in a garden, and the opening of the final historical narrative in a "well." All three sites are literary markers that call up a network of intertextual associations, which Miraji manipulates metaphorically in each narrative.

In the myth, the cast of actors consists of a protagonist (a male human being), and a group of ancillary characters (others like him, a female, feminized spectacles of nature, and food). The interaction of the protagonist with the other characters is depicted as two dichotomous primordial emotional transactions, desire and fear. The protagonist's emotions are pulled out of him at the cusp of responses to various stimuli, including other men (*hamjins*) like him.

The myth moves from desire to fear. Desire hugs need close by it. So as the body's hunger is filled, the body feels pleasure. After pleasuring itself, the body moves outward to night, the time of love, which gives repose/

tranquility and finally, toward fear. For Miraji, forgetfulness, *farāghat*, the feeling provoked by night, is the feeling that anchors the poetics of desire as love. It allows the self release. It permits the self to lose itself in a restful point of stillness, while contemplating an other that is textured differently. *Farāghat* also means gap or space, a hiatus in time and from movement, which mediates between desire and fear. Desire drags the self inward and precedes fear, the emotion through which the self pushes invasive others away. The movement, from in to out, with a break between, modulates the rhythm of the narrative. The story travels from establishing a "self" for the protagonist, through a short space of respite, to his interactions with an "other."²³

Poetry follows close behind need; arising with the opening sentence, and living only in the space already marked off for it—the limits established by need.²⁴ As the myth progresses, and the emotional covenants struck by the first human come to encompass both desire and fear, the borders that cradle poetry change.²⁵ Poetry comes to be produced in the infinite space tucked into and stretched out between these two emotions. Miraji choreographs the cast to enact the emotional covenants between them.

The second story, which intercedes between the mythic and the historical, opens with a garden, the garden of love—one of the common topoi for the ghazal, and the topos (*mazmūn*) that is called upon from the mid-nineteenth century on, when critics want to reform the ghazal. People who enter this garden gather around the beloved. In Miraji's tale, the ghazal turns into the beloved, the object of desire poeticized in it: a beautiful woman/beloved who sits on a bed of flowers, "adorned with sixteen pieces of jewelry," and holds an entire culture in thrall.²⁶ The bed of flowers and the ghazal are cultural cites/sites that come to stand for the obstinate refusal of the past to change. The beloved must be repudiated or lost, and her spell broken for change to occur. Miraji's use of the ghazal/beloved as the nucleus around which a carefully patrolled literary universe revolves and as a marker of a particular representation of the past is consonant with similar positions taken by his contemporaries.²⁷ As in the poem by Faiz, "Don't ask me now, beloved, for the love we once had," tensions between a past that must be left behind along with the elite who create it, and a present that attempts to repudiate this culture but must hold onto it to create, are explored through a poet's relationship to the figure of his beloved.

"Frogs in a well," the opening trope of the last narrative, is a reference to the cloistered *pardah nashīn* women who lived in the zenana, the female sanctum sanctorum of the house. The language of the zenana is the venue through which Miraji can speak about a shift from a shuttered domestic existence to a more expansive one. The well is transformed from a closed linguistic universe, inexorably circling its own circumference, to one with permeable and fluid boundaries. Miraji masculinizes the feminized trope of the well/zenana when he puts it to his own uses. It provides him entree into the discourse of social science, the "perspective of the social," in which the language of modernization is detoured through the bodies of women. Women as signifiers of social change on the subcontinent and as pawns moved on a chessboard of tradition and modernity give Miraji the images for a particular description of modernization.²⁸

CHANGE

The second half of each narrative is defined through change (*tabdīl*). This is the portion of all three that is a litany of temporally ordered events. What, then, is change in these narratives? How is it figured and brought about? How are the results depicted and assessed? Miraji's position on change both conforms to and diverges in significant ways from the clichéd notion of "progress," supposedly introduced to the Indian subcontinent by the British. In all three narratives, change comes about with the inexorable move from a fixed, self-circulating past to a present that is constantly in transition.²⁹ Change then begins to occur at a particular point, sometimes impelled by an event like 1857, and from that moment it becomes the organizational principle for the rest of the narrative. Change, for Miraji, is linear, and unidirectional, though nonteleological. A culture that changes is one that moves inexorably from a simple organization to complex socio-political and literary structures.

Edifices are the icons of change in the narratives; they play their way through all three. In the mythic narrative, change is figured in terms of an outgrowth of "housing." In the other two narratives, change calls for new molds to be poured and structures built. In all three stories Miraji dismantles the initial, carefully choreographed relationships so that the sym-

bolic, taking the form of new institutions, edifices, and buildings, can be constructed.³⁰ The language of construction provides the signifiers of a colonial code. The positive side of the balance-sheet approach to writing imperial history hinges on the enumeration of edifices. The edifices, trains, schools, and bureaucratic institutions—the apparatus of new *technae*, law, medicine, and science—become the material detritus of a civilizing force. N. M. Rashid wrote Miraji a letter in response to an article on Rashid's verse in which Miraji contended that Rashid was too influenced by British sources.³¹ In this letter written in the 1940s, Rashid attempted to point out the fallacy of Miraji's position on the British. Rashid tried to justify his own reliance on British literary sources and in his defense tallies the edifices built by a colonial administration. Ironically, in the process of defending himself, Rashid accuses Miraji of deleting precisely the same edifices that are scattered over Miraji's own historical narratives of the period.

Change, in Miraji's understanding of it, is not produced from within the originary spaces with which his narratives open. These spaces are just the breeding grounds on which change occurs. Neither the conditions that define these spaces nor the actors that perform in them provide the impetus for change or the elements that define the changes that subsequently occur. Although gender does provide some of the tropes through which change is figured. In Miraji's fatalistic, deterministic model, change is brokered by an external force or agent of change that "sweeps in" and creates the conditions for new structures to be built. Change is instituted through a colonial language. It is not in the power of the people who are changing to invoke change—it occurs despite them. So the historical conditions under which Miraji wrote provided the language with which he wrote out a story of change or "progress."

Where, then, does the language to figure the agent/s of change come from? The description of the British in Miraji's narratives plays off the erotics of domination and desire that Miraji explores in the mythic narrative. The British are figured in tropes that are used by Miraji in his "mythic" narrative, where he lays out two emotional transactions between a male protagonist and his world—desire and fear.³² Two sets of affiliations transgress and traverse the dichotomy between desire and fear. The first is the affiliation of the name of the beloved and night with spectacles of nature (*fiṭrat ke maẓāhir*). Night, the feminized personification of na-

ture, stands on the side of desire, while spectacles of nature (also feminized but not personified) stand on the side of fear. Nature is domesticated in two ways: one is through its personification as a beloved, which allows the protagonist to absorb it and lose himself through desire; the other is something that can be looked at but not personified or appropriated and so creates fear. Another thread tying desire to fear in the myth is *ham* (own), which appears on either side of the divide, too. When nature falls into the provenance of desire, it becomes the *hamdam* (own-breath or own-life) of the protagonist. When nature is spectacle, it is aligned with another *ham*, the *hamjins* (own-species), who also inspires fear in the protagonist.

The British are described as a natural phenomenon—a "besieging storm . . . a hurricane of Western culture. . ." They are an uncontrollable natural force, but a masculinized one rather than the feminized ones that can be domesticated either through desire or in terms of fear.³³ Miraji's perspective on the relationship between colonizer and colonized parts company perhaps from a comparable relationship posed by colonizers in that, for Miraji, emotion is not included in his representations of the British. For a poet whose primary narratives hinge on connections established through affect/emotion or the imagination, it is significant that neither desire nor fear play into his depiction of the British. The British are not available as either objects or agents of desire. Why? What does this allow and what discursive purposes does his representation of the British serve?

In fact, his representation has several ramifications. Represented as a masculine natural force that sweeps away everything before it, the British remain in a position of complete authority, although as a disengaged agent of change. They become seemingly disinterested agents of the objective, agents who bring science and commerce, which transform the ways in which things and people are bonded together, separating them inexorably without desire or fear to serve as a glue. In constructing them as a force with whom no emotional connections have been made, Miraji can slide out of the travails of complicity that desire would call up. Without desire or fear to bind him in a complicitous knot with a colonizer, Miraji as a poet can walk away and create a canon. He can play god. He is not fastened by the entrapping ropes that a clearly visible emotional tie with a colonizer would throw around him. Ironically, because he cuts himself off from desire in his literal depiction of the British, he can also linger on hegemony

as that force whose work is done apart from the *visible* strings of desire: the forms of speech, want, pleasure, desire, the turns of phrase, the quotidian habits, that are secreted into the details of the ordinary that come to be normal. "Those Western ideas/thoughts seem to have had an impact on literary and artistic *technae*, specially those which occasion custom or fashion, these, if one considers the issue of creativity, and looks at daily things, and at daily habits, have brought new modes."

THE CROSSROADS: *MUB-HAM CAURĀSTE*

Miraji's account of change is an ambivalent one. He is caught between his clichéd valorization of progress and the disenfranchising implications of a particular type of progress. He speaks of change as a process that destroys a world of the past in order to build new, raw, and perhaps superficial, artistic, social, and political structures that replace the ones from the past. His historical account of his world is infected by the implications of severing connections to the past and established, though contained and fixed, modes (*dhañg, uslūb*) of functioning.

And the causes of this upheaval begin in the murky [*mub-ham*] era of 1857. When from the point of view of social and political norms, earlier connections began to be dispersed and space was made for a new order. One could perhaps say this: that a gap of a few generations had already been established between the current young poets and those older/respected men. Who had seen that time of intellectual turmoil as a pulse. But history and genealogical memories [*naslī yādeñ*] coming together [*mil kar*] make the past era [what has gone by, *guzarā hu'ā zamānā*] its proof; other than this, a person's intelligence is made by bringing together past, present, and future. The past molds his fundamental affairs. Present/time investigates each movement of itself, and those very aspirations, become intentions, and reach completion in the future, to make/render individuality visible.

History, then, and genealogical memories (Miraji might mean forms of chronicle-making here) come together in a certain way. They have in common what they do with a past together: they turn to what has transpired to

find proof of what they say or write in the present. History and genealogical memories, counterposed against a single person's intelligence, are collective forms of record. History is one kind of collective public record of the passing of time and genealogical memory another. Perhaps history is the more abstract collective social production of remembering, and *naslī yādeñ*, in its Arabic connotations twined around begetting, birthing, unraveling, progeny, procreation, reproduction, and messily mixed up with sex, the more embodied version of community memory. But both come together in making what has gone by the locus of proof. Alongside the work they do, and the way they grasp at time as it goes by, is the work done in a person's mind, the work done by his intellect. For a single person the past lays the groundwork for what is special/peculiar to him (*buniyādī khaṣā'ī*). It is the mold into which forms are to be poured. The present checks, looks, sights, thinks through movement. And the future is the time in which what is merely aspiration in the present becomes itself, and in so doing exposes, reveals, or brings the individual into view as himself. However, all these ruminations on time are qualified by a "but," hitched to a *lekin*. This *lekin* points to what ought to be and cannot, will not, quite be.

What halts the trajectory of time is the way that the past is cut off and the movement of time is torn by certain sorts of change. These are the changes wrought by the building of the orders of modernity that also form the architecture of the colonial symbolic: commerce, education, *technae*.³⁴ All three stories feature variants on this building. In the myth, civilization, progress, the stuff of modernity, heralds a new age. Between this age, and the past in nature, is an undefined inexplicable hiatus. In the fable, the British arrive as a hurricane that sweeps away, decimates. In the history, 1857 is the time of the rupture, when "earlier connections began to be dispersed." Myth, fable, history, all allegories for each other, weave the modern into the colonial. All tell of the break between past and future common to the advent of modernity, and which commits modernity to the ascendance of colonialism.³⁵

People trapped in the process of change are, according to Miraji, marked by forgetting as a loss of memory (*yād nahīn* rather than *farāghat*, forgetfulness as repose). In replacing the old with the new, they have lost their connection to a prior tradition so utterly that they are left without the sense of which language they speak or read. Without a past, and without

established modes of communication, however limited and fixed, people cannot even conceptualize their present and do not have the ability to project a future. They have no idea what their trajectory might be. They are trapped in the dilemma of "progress," a dilemma which signals the incompleteness of, or perhaps the temporary failure of, modernity (difficulties perhaps allegorized by the *Titanic*). The trope Miraji uses to embody this condition of trauma, characterized by an obscured sight-line, and by an inability to read time, is the "crossroads." The metaphor of the crossroads at which Urdu poets stand allows Miraji to describe Urdu poetry as both replete with choices and haunted by ambivalence.³⁶

And the new poet stands at a crossroads from which many roads leave, to the right, to the left, to the front, and to the back. But he doesn't really know which road he has picked. What importance the experiences of the past have for him. For how long he must stand this way. . . .

The old supports on the basis of which people passed their entire lives in the dilemmas of a domestic existence no longer remain with him. He is now all alone and on a quest for help.

Colonialism maps onto modernity to fracture time, pull it apart, and disperse it in different directions. A poet standing in the midst of this messiness has only an endlessly circulating present under his control. The place at which he stands, the crossroads, offer no solution, for they are not marked by directionals, no name, no mileposts, no arrows pointing to a place. Nothing on them indicates where they go in space or where they might lead in time. This fluidity offers infinite possibility, but one that is meaningless without anchors that tell one whether something was a possibility in the past, was an event in the past, or will be a possibility in the future.

Miraji's position seems to be a reformulation of a deterministic model of choice for a colonized poet living under colonial control and writing his history as a colonial history. His circumstances—past, present, and future, he seems to imply—are completely determined by forces outside his control. His choices, according to him, are so completely mediated by an incomprehensible environment that any choice he makes can never be understood by him or explained to another.

THE ALTERNATIVE

In this state, the new poet began to swerve/totter/flinch. This was the root/basic rule of the world, that whoever is beaten or has an accident, they must be pushed/shoved over by her [the world], so that they have the strength to refuse [*manah ke bal karen*].³⁷

How does one recover from this traumatic beating or traumatic accident? Miraji offers one solution at the close of his essay:

But we will have to await this time with hope. A time when the warp and woof [nerves and sinews] of life's political, social, and personal dealings no longer need to be disentangled [set properly]. In that kind of time, we will hold onto an empathetic way of seeing [sympathetic sight-line], while paying close attention to this truth of new poetry—that, despite its expansive, extensive possibilities, it is still experimental. It is the kind of experiment for which it is both improper and meaningless to hope for a quick/speedy culmination/resolution/sense of completeness, and whose future really promises a glorious vision/visionariness.

These successes, or possibilities, are in the hands of the new poets. If they contemplate every side of every issue intently through their hearts, and pay careful attention to it, think hard upon it with affection and sincerity, and move forward with a collective heart or will, then whatever befalls them, the field [of possibilities] will sit within their grasp [will remain in their hands].

Miraji's solution calls for a certain kind of vision, one that demands a rigorous scrutiny that brings the heart together with the mind. To see into a future built out of a past that has destroyed, one needs the sight-lines offered by a desiring intellect. It is precisely this desiring intellect that Miraji evokes in a series of translations and essays he published in *Adabī duniyā* in the 1930s.³⁸ The passage to the crossroads is paved with dismantled literary lineages replaced by new ones picked by someone else. Rather than lying (down) and dying, Miraji made a call for a self-reflexive construction of new literary affiliations. In an attempt to give birth to this new network, Miraji wrote a series of essays to accompany translations into Urdu of the

work of several transnational literary figures.³⁹ These essays provided an alternative to both a dismantled Urdu literary heritage and the filiative lineages from British literature that Miraji believed produced aborted literary children in Urdu poetry.

Through the essays, Miraji performed two tasks. He introduced the Urdu literati of his time to a range of voices, from Sappho to Lawrence. In writing them, he refocuses the modes through which Europeans were represented to Indians. Miraji did not automatically valorize the writers he introduced in his essays; rather, he attempted to construct his own historical frame for them. This frame provided him the space for reformulating the uncertain unequal balances of colonial relationships. The Europeans about whom he wrote, among them the French Symbolists and Heine, were presented in a conflicted relationship with their world. They had been consigned to forms of abjection. He discussed them in terms of the ambivalence with which they were read by their cultures. He framed them with the silences that he felt surrounded them—the attempt by Europeans to silence their own by excluding them from the Western canon, and the legal proscriptions as well as the silent reception of their initial publications, or in the case of Sappho, the way they had been over time consigned to amorality and obscurity.

He read Europe, the hegemonic culture, in the context of its own shortcomings. His essays portrayed the blindness of European culture and its initial conflictual relationship with writers it later canonized. What Miraji turned on Europe was the language of progress—darkness to light—that he felt was being used on Urdu literature.⁴⁰ His essay on Li Po gave him the opportunity to exercise similar strategies, providing him the opportunity to emphasize and denounce the relative barbarity of Europe at the time when Li Po wrote. One of the few British writers Miraji included in his new canon of references for Urdu poets was D. H. Lawrence. In his essay on Lawrence, without extensive analysis, Miraji insisted that the Briton was a paradigmatic example of the influence of the East on British literature. Although it is as absurd as any of the allegations by anxious defenders of the Western canon, Miraji's assertion takes the same form, and with it he frames his narrative on Lawrence with a statement of faith that provides the very language through which the poet himself ought to be read.

BAUDELAIRE: THE TROUBLED
MASTER OF THE MODERN

Strange Familiars

I took my tranquility on a walk
and chose my roads by their angled slant.
What I glimpsed I sighted from a tower's height.
The city's glory seen so, from here
to those places of rest, what do I imagine
hold those gestures of hell for me: jails, warehouses, hospital.

Those places of rest bloom like the flowers of evil.
You know well, Satan, the cause of my discomfort.
You know well, this knowing: that I could not come here
eyes found on the road, alchemize
tears into flowers.

I, the old and worn heart, a hedonist
there, my faith tested, on arrival.
Far away, I thirsted, my heart's vagrancy.
Whose hellish beauty brings me to my youth.

My heart clings to you,
your familiarity, O dishonored city
dream that sleep, heavy with wet shadows
on your expanse bares the day's first light, a wave gathering
your body, clothed with the plain dress of night's color

prey and death-dealer, hunting the pleasures of their own forms/being
the blind never come, to the humility of their degraded familiars.⁴¹

Baudelaire's work becomes a leitmotif in Miraji's work and life, a leitmotif that appears in the guise of translation. Over the course of his life, Miraji wrote about Baudelaire several times, carrying Baudelaire's poetry in translation over from his early essay on Baudelaire written in Lahore, to those for "Bātefī" published in *Sāqī* while he lived in Delhi, to pieces he wrote in *Kitāb-e pareshān* during the period immediately preceding his death in Bombay.⁴² We are told that when Miraji died, he died with a book

about Baudelaire at hand. What was it about this poet, whom Miraji called "the ascetic priest of the whore houses," that so enticed Miraji?⁴³

Miraji's first essay on Baudelaire, "*Cārls Baudela'ir*," was published in *Adabī duniyā* in the 1930s, and was included in the collection *Mashriq o maghrib ke naghmeñ*. The conditions for writing it are clearly articulated in the opening sections of the essay: Baudelaire's life and writing needed to be translated into Urdu to fill out the skirt of Urdu poetry, by bringing to it a poet who divulged the horror of a certain life played out during a particular historical period, while he was completely absorbed in the contours of that horror.

Baudelaire was useful to those *ḥaqīqat parast* poets who were themselves enamored of a "reality" that they had translated through the bodies of victims, slaves, and the cheapened lives of criminals and sinners. Baudelaire was useful precisely because the horror he expressed through his poetry was not one merely felt by him while he contemplated the disintegration of another's life, but the necessary emotion that told his own lived experience. This timbre of dread that Baudelaire offered, that it not be an anesthetized response to another's pain, would, Miraji believed, provide a necessary option to the contemplative distance with which the Progressives seemed to view and then represent the subjects of their literary endeavors.

Baudelaire was also useful because the experience of horror that he laid out so exquisitely in his writing was not reflection, not mimesis, but one that was alchemized as it detoured through the intellect, *fikr o gḥaur*, through imagination, *taḥayyul*, *ḵhayāl* (the imaginary), and through the rigorous contemplation, *taṣavvur*, of emotion. Miraji believed that mimesis in Baudelaire was undercut by a desire that could never be consummated or fulfilled—desire for another person, desire for oneself—desire contoured in a Blakean cityscape. Despite the fact that Baudelaire's desire did not quite ever arrive at completeness, or resolution, this sort of desire pushed the writer toward himself, making that aesthetic separation between writer and signified, which Miraji felt modulated mimesis, impossible. Baudelaire, as Miraji depicted him, rarely furnished the others (or the self as other) who inhabited his poetry as objects of disinterested knowledge (a prerequisite of mimesis). This complex interweaving of emotion and intellect, when rendered through technique—craft, skill, *fann*—turned into poetry. Miraji gave his contemporaries their own precursors

through which to contemplate these moments in Baudelaire: Iqbal, who produced aim, movements in particular directions, but ones that were not supposed to arrive at destinations, and Ghalib. Miraji brought Baudelaire and Ghalib together, because though both were very different in kind, both lived in the lyric tension between longing that pulled inward and outward and the crafted play with language, sign as symbol, that pulled poetry askew through *fikr*. In Miraji's encapsulation of Ghalib's work in Ghalib's voice to describe the sympathy between Ghalib and Baudelaire, "pleasure can never be birthed without the capable elegance of ghazal"—*baqadr-e zaug nahīn yarf-e tangnā-e ghazal*.

Baudelaire's aesthetic project, though detouring around mimesis, mimed the requirements Miraji laid out at the end of "Nayī shā'iri" for a poet who needed to live through his conditions of loss and failure in the face of the trauma of forgetting his past. Baudelaire was the poet of memory as sudden, of history as something that flashes up at a moment of danger. It was this Baudelaire of *tārīkh* and *infirādī ḥāfiḡah* (of history and personal memory) that Miraji returned to at the end of his own life to invoke in "Bāteñ."⁴⁴ This Baudelaire of Miraji's was someone who went to the flesh as the pliant thickness through which memory was bodied, "a circle of hair, half the world; for a time that lingers long, let me feel my hair's perfume // let me nestle, bury my face in its dense heaviness; as a thirsty man, perhaps, who pours his face in to the spring, as though the spring were a scented handkerchief; let me slap it back and forth as it flows off my hand, so that memories will shake off, and sprinkle into the wind."⁴⁵ Different forms of remembering—those evoked by history, desire (for food, for visions), and personal ones—and which ones offered lines of sight that were true, and which false, how was one to know (and was that the appropriate question to ask)?⁴⁶

What Baudelaire did for Miraji was to bring the body to seeing. In this formulation, Baudelaire offered a visionary embodiedness to poets who wanted to represent what they saw in ways that removed their body (a face buried, the flesh that remembered) from the telos of seeing. This Baudelaire is somewhat akin and somewhat different from Benjamin's Baudelaire, who sees "the experience which presented itself to [his] Baudelaire's eyes in its undistorted version."⁴⁷

Miraji's Baudelaire also gifted to writers crafting poetry under colonial

auspices the material embodiments of modernity's spectrality which accrued around memory, trauma, and the self. The conditions of modernity, as Baudelaire told them, were not dressed up and covered over, but displayed in their naked exactitude. Seeing, in the poem "Strange Familiars" that inaugurates this section of the present chapter, requires the production of lines of sight, but not as something thrown out from a still, unremarked place. These lines of sight are described, brought into the body of the poem as the "I" looks: roads chosen for their angled slant, a tower that permits glimpses of the city's glory. Sightings of the modern may be from distances that incline subjects in a particular way in relation to what is seen, but those distances are sited, placed tangibly. For example, the tower becomes the moment of the archaic, perhaps a position from which archers lined up to kill, and so displays the city's glories. But this possible archaic takes vision over and triangles it to the buildings of modernity which are jails, warehouses, hospitals where the eyes rest and restore themselves. The eyes that see have to be found, picked up from a road, and their seeing is not straight: sight becomes the place of ironic, reversed alchemy that transfers across substance, transmuting glory into prisons, and tears into flowers. The specter takes shape, turns into flesh as something other than itself. Seeing, therefore, is a gift, held out to those who see through colonialism's vision; it is not transparent, and its transparency (producing the mimetic) must be alchemized into forms of (perhaps incomplete) incorporation.⁴⁸

Baudelaire, in Miraji's telling of him, embodied a very particular relationship to English colonialism. His work was the culmination of the new in the modern, and it followed a European teleology. Baudelaire was the necessary inheritor of the poetic legacy carried over from Greek and Roman masters like Plato and Plutarch, Aflātūn and Plūtark. It was Baudelaire, and not English writers, who brought to Europe the transitional poetics of the modern, to expand the vocabulary and syntax of modernity's imaginary and symbolic. The British, who were, in their usual way, oblivious to the genius living close by, needed Baudelaire, in translation, so that they too could begin to partake of the richness he had wrought.⁴⁹ But Baudelaire himself turned to translation as he wrote. One site of translation that was incorporated into Baudelaire's work was his translation of Edgar Allan Poe from English. Another site of translation, whose influence Miraji left open, was the translation of Calcutta and the humid density of

the Indian colony that Miraji claimed Baudelaire visited as a youth in 1841, into Baudelaire's poetry. In his essay on Baudelaire, Miraji pushed Baudelaire into completing the journey to Calcutta, which Baudelaire had aborted in Mauritius/Reunion. Baudelaire's journey to India becomes the first stopping point in the poet's ceaseless *āvāragī*, wandering, and one on which he chose to embark.⁵⁰ Baudelaire's journey becomes Miraji's translated *désire* to take the poet over into the subcontinent.

By turning to Baudelaire to explore translation as a form of reading and writing, and as the place where desire was given substance, Miraji interjected back into translation the reader, "envisaged as [those] to whom the reading of lyric poetry would present difficulties," who had been left as though blank in Benjamin's discussion of translation.⁵¹ For Baudelaire was a poet who created his reading public, "probably one of the first poets of the new poets of the West, who selected his readers (those he addressed, the *mukhātib*) carefully, and in the process expanded the definition of the addressee. His poetry was written for his *zāt*, for his species or his race."⁵² The reader, the person to whom a translation might be directed, was in the terrain of colonial translation, a dense site of racialized desire. Miraji revisits the triangulation of text, reader, and writer in his second essay on Baudelaire, where the text triangulates between two parallel lines of desire (those emanating from the reader, and those from the writer), forcing their meeting in peculiar ways.

The project of colonial translation, around the time that Miraji had Baudelaire visiting India, was organized around texts translated from English into vernacular. These translations were expected to transform, to imbue the colonized subject with the proprieties of English manhood.⁵³ Transposing Baudelaire onto this project of translation revealed the improprieties of its intent. Baudelaire was, after all, the kind of dissolute subject whose translation into Indian vernaculars would heighten rather than alleviate the dissoluteness of the colonized. And if Baudelaire was the one poet who could bring to English what it really ought to know about the Satanic (Blakean) forms taken by modernity, then the proprieties that colonial translation wanted to gift the colonized were lies.

Translation had a another valence in Baudelaire. Translation in Miraji's version of it is never merely conducted neatly between one language and another. Its forms are *pecā*. Incarnations of translated text twist and turn

between multiple discourses, between languages that do not map, even easily. Translations go back and forth between so many incommensurate worlds of speaking and doing, thick with power, dense with the anguish of hate and unrequited desire, that one has no sense where might they have once begun. Miraji turns to Baudelaire's supposed sojourn in Calcutta to explore the possibility that the anguish, rage, and dissoluteness that Baudelaire brought to his dark spiritual transactions with modernity might have come from Calcutta. Calcutta might have been the precursor of Jeanne Duval, the half black, half white lover who Baudelaire took up with when he returned to Paris from his trip abroad. In demanding (in a historical error) that Baudelaire arrive at the place, Calcutta, he refused to reach, Miraji asks for a reading of Duval that can be interposed with colonial, British desire, fear and hatred for bodies that are made to slide between Africa and India (Mauritius).⁵⁴ But Miraji's narrative begins Baudelaire's journey to Calcutta with Baudelaire's negotiations with his two fathers (the proper and the improper one).⁵⁵

Baudelaire's life gives Miraji the material for reading his poetry. The linchpin event of Baudelaire's life, according to Miraji, is the primordial rupture that occurred in Baudelaire's youth. Baudelaire had had an idyllic childhood, saturated with sexuality for his mother. In a letter to his mother, Baudelaire reminisces about his feelings for her: "In the days of my childhood, there was a time when my heart was full of a kind of severe, excessive love for you. . . . This was a time when my entire being clung to you. And you were entirely mine. You were both a friend to me and a kind of idol I could worship."⁵⁶ Baudelaire's father, who was consigned to the background of his memories, died. His mother remarried a soldier diplomat, versed in the niceties of bourgeois masculinity: material comfort, soldierly deportment, the regularized order of middle-class propriety. Baudelaire hated his new father for stealing his mother away; he hated him with a passion that drove him to *āvāragī*, to dissolute wandering. This stepfather, wanting to inculcate his own sense of order in Baudelaire, restricted Baudelaire's access to his inheritance from his dead father. Baudelaire writes to his mother about this break with his past and the hunger that pulled him to vagrancy: "As that time came to a close, I remembered it with fresh violence."⁵⁷ "Sometimes . . . I stay in bed for three days. . . . I have no freshly washed clothes, no food to eat. The only things that sustain me are

wine and alcohol. All my pain is washed away in their substance, but my life does not seem to improve."⁵⁸

This rent in the fabric of Baudelaire's life, that tore the imaginary, taking it to an illegitimate symbolic, and sent the poet to the vagrancy of a concerted refusal of all that symbolic represented, gave Baudelaire a peculiar insight into the dark side of modernity. Baudelaire lived a life between an absent father, a mother he left, and a stepfather. In this, Baudelaire's triangulated desires figured the impossible configurations of colonial modernity. But those desires did not produce the proper man. Instead, Baudelaire lived the life of an indolent hedonist, fueling his vision into the underbelly of the city of newness with wine and opium. He became the utterly improper man, whose refusals of propriety allowed him to see with the "eye picked up at the side of road," and through a darkened spirituality, "alchemize tears into flowers."⁵⁹ Baudelaire becomes the poet who, following on the heels of Dostoyevsky, brings together

a congregation of contraries. Where the excesses of purity and darkness wind around each other unmanageably. The eyes of their forebears [looking upon them] overflow with the enticements and desire of their completely indecent, unseemly words. . . . It is as though [in their work] darkness and light are coupled in the human world of the seen, in the way in which they necessarily and properly come together in the world beyond sight. Two pleasures who wish, hand in hand, you may call them whatever you will: good and evil, freely creative and necessarily ordered faculties, old and new, worshipping the ancients and the call to revolution.⁶⁰

But the language of longing, love, and hate that organizes the ordered chaos of modernity that Baudelaire views with such palpable intensity might well have come from his traumatic encounter (imagined for him by Miraji) with a colonial other. Miraji describes the first journey he sends Baudelaire on, into the heart of his darkness:

In 1841 his inheritance allowed him a trip to India, and he reached Calcutta. His stay here was a little less than a year. One reason might have been that at a really young, unripe age, he obtained the visual capital that allowed his nature to transform. Also, it is clear from the events of his life, that the dark savory beauty of the sea of Bengal had

a striking effect on his unformed mind. He must have seen a temple dedicated to Kali, the goddess of darkness. And the story of the *devī-mātā* [goddess mother], that philosophical rumination on injury long concealed in it, with the fullness of its seductive enchanted secrets, stole into his heart like a magical figure, giving its years of suppressed lonely personhood a gift of natural darkness that revitalized and awoke those suppressions in a fresh untouched mode. We must also remember that he came, a dweller of a cold nation. His sexual defenses had not yet been completely formed. And they could not repel different forms of air and water. He had to stay in the sort of country that was not merely not cold, but whose humid warmth and hot wet wind drove the being of a person bred in Europe to extreme disgust and displeasure. The sharp excessive heat of places like India and Africa don't just turn such people towards bodily dis-ease, but also troubles and disturbs them to such an extent that their souls are utterly tormented. This acute feeling matures from the world and causes them to turn away in revolt from the immortality of life, but also gives them new avenues to explore in their social universe, such that they begin a search for the enticements of an excited wailing lament.

For Baudelaire, sexual indulgences were not new things. But in a new world, racial allurements were visible in a new heightened color. In close proximity with Kali Devi and her stories what desires might he have felt. In that dark seductive spicy beauty what enticements was he shown? The proper reply to this is not available to us, we can only approximate it and see its gestures [in his work]. For Indians [unlike for Baudelaire], the dark seduction and beauty is alluring to community, nation, and religion. If you are dark, then the people you love will also look the same, dark. Because the beloved is the imaginary reflection of the lover.⁶¹

The dynamic of seepage, incorporation and externalization, repulsion; of pleasure and despair; and "revolt from the immortality of life"—all of this sends "dwellers of cold nations on a search for the enticements of their own voice, ecstatic and mourning." Baudelaire, pushed by Miraji to conclude a journey he never completed, is sent off to accrue "visual capital," to see the possible origins of what might have led him to write as he did, signifying a black body, moving it in response to his desires, the doubled ecstatic and

mourning search for a beauty between black and white. In Jeanne Duval, Miraji's Baudelaire finds something that never was, bought with capital borrowed from other colonial journeys, "the dark savory beauty of the sea of Bengal, the power translated across another differential" of "Kali, the goddess of darkness." In Miraji's translation, Baudelaire's poem "The Song of Darkness" produces Jeanne Duval as the fetish (nature as fetish/desire) that stands in for modernity's ruptures (generating responses: attraction, repulsion/mourning, excitement). Jeanne Duval "merely allows Baudelaire a necessary capacity, never permitted speech," signified over and over, and "her lustrous secret" embodies and provokes a search:

The dark heart of hate
when all roads close
the gift of grief it bears. . . .⁶²

Her every word is tainted black
she face of darkness appears before me, night's soul in hand.
Her eyes hidden in a cave's thick dark, whose lustrous secrets, whose
glances angled like lightening, tear open night's veil.⁶³

The journey that Baudelaire was sent on by Miraji may have allowed him to translate himself, and his racialization into the European modern, through his significations of a dark lover. The stories offered in a colonial context, of the dark goddess's trials with death, transmuted through the horror of dealing with a bodily trauma that infected the cold body of Europe with warmth, may have been the genesis of Baudelaire's repeated evocations of the trauma of separation from the imaginary and entry into the step-symbolic. But this trauma is an alchemized version of that very trauma that Miraji describes over and over again in his essay on new poetry. And the colonizer is not immune to it. And the colonizer learns how to speak it only through the cleaved longing of his own desire, gifted to him through the visit he is forced to make to the dense, spicy, hot, contrary worlds of Asia and Africa. So to speak modernity's abysses (and abjections) one might well have to trade in those desires acquired under the auspices of colonial power, translating these desires through a doubly racialized, mis-mapped body, once one returned to the metropole.

What kind of lesson does this enforced journey offer a poet writing about the worlds of their own object, in the vernacular, in the colony, in

the fractured space of their own modernity? Perhaps that the semiotics that the colonized deploy to describe the crowd of the abject (whose lives incarnate modernity) are necessarily given to them through their own racialization. Perhaps that colonialism and modernity share the same proper stepfathers, who must be set aside if one is to repudiate their influence. Perhaps that modernity and colonialism are intimately woven together through the dark edges of desire. Perhaps that what poets who write back from the spaces of colonization consider their own reflection of their own world is likely to be the translation, albeit a new one, of an insane translation. This insane translation could only be done by Westerners who had to be made to finish their journeys (against their own detours back to their cold world) to the world of heat to garner through repulsion as attraction their spiritual visions of the spoilage of modernity. And perhaps that the colonized consider in their reflection of themselves an accounting of a desire, now denied them, that sees and remembers in its own image of darkness, an unspoiled love. But memory here must be aroused through the body, through synaesthesia, smell, touch, feel, sound, however visualized and however spectralized.

To go to Baudelaire as the exemplary alternative offered by Miraji to his compatriots, caught as they are in the terrifying loss of memory that attends modernity and the advent of colonialism, is to go to Miraji's truncated, transmuted translation of the epitaph, written by someone whom he thought of as an exemplary translator of Baudelaire onto the English scene—Swinburne on Baudelaire's death in 1867:

Oh my brother
 in the old season of your songs,
 you saw those secrets, that grief, that anguish
 which is denied us.
 The harsh tautness of love's knife flame
 at a place at night
 where no one has dared breathe til now
 the petals of sweet love's poisonous buds
 bloomed for your delicate gaze.
 No one else even glimpsed them.
 The secret treasure of time's ripe fertility
 its faults which have no astronomy

those things leached clean of happiness.
 Two places, where with the eyes of a grieving soul
 as it turns in sleep, turns from the dust motes
 of strange dreams and weeps,
 on each face you glimpsed a shadow so
 you saw that what people gather in a garden
 bloom only as thorn.⁶⁴