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ARTICLES



Vernacular, unacknowledged multilingualism, and esoteric code: failed revelations in J. L. Borges's 'Averroës' Search' and R. Kipling's 'The finest story in the world'

Dominique Jullien

University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on the idea that the vernacular (conceived as a context-dependent relation between socially unequal languages) can sometimes enable a form of communication that excludes the socially superior non-speaker, a kind of secret language or “dark tongue” (Heller-Roazen), of which parables, whose quotidian appearance serves both to reveal and conceal an esoteric message, provide a template. As a language shared by the disenfranchised yet inaccessible to the powerful, I explore the vernacular’s potential as a vehicle for coded esoteric messages, and its intersection with issues of “unacknowledged multilingualism” (Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 2) in two stories of epistemological failure: Borges’s “Averroës’ Search” and Kipling’s “Finest Story in the World”. Both stories stage a tension between a monolingual-imperial paradigm and an unrecognized multilingual constellation. Both ascribe the failure of revelation to the protagonists’ inability to grasp the multiplicity of languages, cultures and beliefs that underpins their imperial environment (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 20). I focus on the local/global entanglements pivotal to these stories, and the paradoxical ways in which the spiritual encoding of vernaculars intersects the cosmopolitan and monolingual paradigms that determine their characters’ thinking.

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I am a merchant, and I have a precious stone to sell. This stone restores sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, makes the mute able to speak, and infuses wisdom into the foolish.¹

This essay takes as its starting point the relational nature of the notion of vernacular, which is not to be conceived in isolation but rather as a context-dependent relation between socially embedded languages. Acknowledging its complexity and instability (Shaden Tageldin calls it a ‘terminological

CONTACT Dominique Jullien  djullien@frit.ucsb.edu

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quicksand' and an 'errant site'),² I want to focus on a specific effect of the vernacular's contextual relevance. The term 'vernacular' (which, as Tageldin and many others remind us, etymologically posits a master-slave relation since it originally applies to the language of a house-born slave)³ is bound to an unequal power situation, which also has a linguistic dimension. It often applies to the language of disenfranchised, enslaved or colonised people. As such, the use of the socially inferior vernacular allows for a certain paradoxical reversibility, since it can enable a form of communication that excludes the socially superior non-speaker: 'it can be understood both as something commonly shared – the language of the community – and as a secret language, hidden from view from the powers that be'.⁴ My analysis focuses on the potential role of the vernacular as a vehicle for secret communication, whether the hidden message is political or spiritual or both. In the following case studies, the vernacular is positioned as a local language as opposed to a cosmopolitan imperial or colonial language (Arabic in the Borges story, English in the Kipling story) – and distinctly marked as an inferior language. This makes it an apt means of esoteric communication for the initiated, yet off limits to the uninitiate, the cosmopolitan elite for whom the everyday life and language of the masses are generally unworthy of serious attention. This also sets up a site of tension between the local and the global, reflecting the ambiguity and slipperiness that characterise the 'dynamic and unpredictable relationship between vernacular and cosmopolitan'.⁵

Drawing on the idea of the vernacular as a language shared by the disenfranchised yet inaccessible to the powerful (native vs. coloniser's language, popular vs. elite language, profane vs. sacred language), this paper explores the vernacular's potential as a vehicle for coded messages of spirituality. As Daniel Heller-Roazen argued in *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers*, various forms of slang and other secret languages enable a lower social group to reverse the power dynamic by excluding higher authorities from knowledge.⁶ The vernacular, I suggest, shares with various kinds of dark tongues – secret languages from the criminal to the spiritual – a formal analogy and a structural kinship. I look at cases where the vernacular works as a code to reveal and conceal at the same time – conceal to outsiders, reveal to insiders – a spiritual truth or message. The more the vernacular language seems tied to the everyday reality of subordinate people (hence unworthy of attention by the powerful), the more it can be appropriated to convey a higher order of reality. Thus the vernacular, despite being associated with the lower orders of reality, can become the vehicle of spiritual revelation, whose success or failure hinges on comprehension and/or translation of the vernacular message. The Gospel parables provide a template for this use of the vernacular as code: the mundane, lay appearance of the stories serves both to reveal and conceal their covert spiritual dimension. Hagiography, specifically the Lives of Saints Barlaam and Josaphat (which is a medieval

appropriation of the Buddha story filtered through an Arabic retelling), offers another example of a spiritual secret smuggled in the guise of a common commercial transaction. The idea of an important revelation conveyed and concealed in an apparently unimportant vernacular utterance sheds light on the two modern literary examples analysed in this essay. Both stories feature a failed revelation that hinges on the misunderstanding of a vernacular situation: Rudyard Kipling's 1891 'The Finest Story in the World' (where the revelations about the London clerk's past lives are conveyed 'in the vernacular', i.e. Hindustani rather than English), and Jorge Luis Borges's story 'Averroës' Search' (where Averroës's misunderstanding of Aristotle's notions, 'tragedy' and 'comedy', hinges on the missed clue of the street children role-playing in the vernacular). I focus on the defeat narrated by these stories, both as an illustration of modern parable, a genre that entails a failure of communication, and also as an example of the local/global conundrum pivotal to these stories, and the paradoxical ways in which the spiritual encoding of the vernacular intersects the cosmopolitan paradigms that determine their characters' thinking. These stories, I argue, provide early illustrations of an 'unacknowledged multilingualism' paradigm; the fact that the socially unsanctioned vernacular is the medium of the revelation offers a good point of entry into the tension between monolingual paradigm and multilingual practice,⁷ and more generally into the unacknowledged interweaving of local and global.

Seeds, weeds, and healing stones: the vernacular as code in the parabolic context

The Gospel parables afford a serviceable template for the esoteric interpretation of the vernacular, understood in the broadest possible way: not restricted to language, but applied more generally to these stories' subject-matter. Parables' typical engagement with commonplace realities of ordinary people's lives draws a line between two groups of listeners, the ones who understand their spiritual meaning and the ones who don't. The mundane themes of parables (farm work, wine-making, fishing, domestic chores, master-servant relations, and so forth) ambiguously define their audience as including both the people able to relate to it and those able to rise above it. Since the 'patent everydayness' of the story (to quote Robert Funk in his seminal essay 'The Parable as Metaphor') encourages non-literal reading, the quotidian becomes a kind of code for a spiritual truth.⁸ The parabolic language is meant both to be understood and to be misunderstood, both to reveal and to conceal a higher truth, usually designated in metaphorical terms as the kingdom of God: in this way, the parable 'turns everydayness inside out or upside down'.⁹ Mark's Jesus famously tells his apostles: 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside,

everything comes in parables, in order that they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand' (Mark 4:11–12).¹⁰ This is preceded by the meta-parable of the Sower, where the seed metaphor is meant to be understood spiritually, as a figure of the word of God, which thrives or fails depending on the 'soil' (in metaphorical terms, the spiritual readiness) of its hearers (4:3–9). The dual and conflicting purpose of the vernacular code (the story's ordinariness) is displayed on two different levels as both a decoy for the uninitiated crowds, who have ears but hear not, who are content to take the story literally, thus missing its allegorical message, and as a signal for the few initiated listeners (the disciples, the ones who have ears and hear) who will be enjoined to go through and beyond the literal content and access the hidden spiritual truth: 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!' (4:9). Because of its ordinariness, the vernacular aspect of the parable also works to defuse suspicion from the authorities, to circumvent censorship, as noted by Angus Fletcher.¹¹ Similarly parables maintain a delicate balance between provocation and obedience to authority (whether political, such as Roman colonial powers, or religious, such as orthodox priestly dogmas), by claiming to be nothing more than stories about farming or fishing, for example.

The story of saints Josaphat and Barlaam is a Christian version of the Buddha story which entered Christian hagiography through an Arabic retelling, the seventh-century tale of *Bilawar and Budhasaf*.¹² In its *Golden Legend* avatar, the hermit Barlaam poses as a merchant to gain access to the young prince Josaphat, claiming to possess a miraculous stone: 'I am a merchant, and I have a precious stone to sell. This stone restores sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, makes the mute able to speak, and infuses wisdom into the foolish. Take me therefore to the king's son, and I will sell him the stone'.¹³ The trope used by Barlaam, the stone as spiritual truth, with its corollary metaphor of the merchant as prophet and teacher, serves both to attract the intended audience (prince Josaphat, who immediately understands the coded message and invites the 'merchant' into his rooms) and to warn off the undesirable audience (the prince's tutor, who is told that he mustn't look at the stone because it will blind the man whose eyesight is dim and whose life is not sufficiently pure: another play on the literal and the metaphoric). The merchant figure is especially noteworthy because merchants did in fact play an essential role in the circulation of goods, ideas and stories across languages and cultures. As Ros Ballaster emphasised, narrative and mercantile exchanges were linked and mutually supported by each other.¹⁴ Merchants were also, of course, vehicles of linguistic exchange, ensuring a certain fluidity between vernaculars and *linguae francae*. The story of Buddha travelled along the Silk Road, crossing religious borders along the path from India to Europe: Barlaam-as-merchant represents the new Christian ideas that enter the pagan kingdom through trade relations.

'The tongue best suited': the vernacular in Kipling's reincarnation tale

What these different parables have in common is the setting of an ostensibly everyday situation (farm work, commercial transaction, etc.), encoding a secret spiritual meaning, meant to be revealed to some and concealed from others. The vernacular, whether in form or content, provides 'a linguistic space of freedom in an oppressive context',¹⁵ thus is well suited to selectively deliver a hidden message. Turning away from the Biblical context, I propose to look at Rudyard Kipling's 'The Finest Story in the World', admired and translated by Borges,¹⁶ a story in which the vernacular is instrumental in the revelation of a spiritual secret. Kipling's narrator befriends a London bank clerk named Charlie Mears, who 'was twenty years old and suffered from aspirations'.¹⁷ Charlie is a thoroughly unremarkable young man whose mediocrity extends to his literary attempts: but the story he tells the narrator, and which he proves so incapable of writing, is a powerful and astonishing one. The clerk has involuntary memories of his previous lives that bubble up out of him: memories of being a Greek galley-slave, and (later) a Viking sailor. The narrator is eager to harvest these snatches of memories from Charlie, with the goal of writing 'the finest story in the world', and pretends to encourage Charlie in his literary aspirations only to milk him for his reminiscences: 'It would be folly to allow his idea to remain in his own inept hands, when I could do so much with it' (290). Toward the middle of the story the narrator runs into an acquaintance, a Bengali law student residing in London named Grish Chunder, who reveals to him that the memories are a rare side effect of reincarnation and that they will cease the moment Charlie experiences the love of a woman. Soon thereafter a proud and beaming Charlie confides to the narrator that he has met a young girl, inflicting upon him a tawdry love poem. The door to the past is closed forever: in the final sentence of the story, 'Grish Chunder was right, Charlie had tasted the love of woman that kills remembrance, and the finest story in the world would never be written' (312).

The climactic moment of revelation in this story occurs in a dialogue between the narrator and Grish Chunder, and coincides with a code-switching from English to 'the vernacular', a blanket term used by the British in India to designate all Indian languages, according to Harish Trivedi (more on this later). 'I began to tell the story of Charlie in English, but Grish Chunder put a question in the vernacular, and the history went forward naturally in the tongue best suited for its telling. After all it could never have been told in English' (303). Why couldn't the story be told in English, and why was the vernacular the tongue best suited to it? The slippage of the dialogue into the vernacular, the lexical borrowing, the smattering of Indian terms in the Grish Chunder episode, reflect a situation in which according to linguist

Uriel Weinreich, ‘a given vocabulary is inadequate in the cultural environment in which the contact occurs’.¹⁸ Charlie’s story is one of reincarnation, which is the basis of the Hindu religion but of which the English are ignorant. Charlie himself neither knows nor cares about his past lives, and thus is barred from the revelation of truth, to which only the Hindu Grish Chunder is privy. The narrator smugly observes, ‘bank-clerks do not understand metempsychosis’ (294). Fittingly for a bank-clerk, Charlie is more interested in the percentage that he should get from the proceeds of the story, even though no word of it has yet been published: ‘Aren’t you ever going to finish that story and give me some of the profits?’ (307), he asks, and later “‘I think I deserve twenty-five per cent’ [...]. ‘I supplied all the ideas, didn’t I?’” (309). As for the narrator, he is less interested in the reincarnation mystery, than in capturing and writing ‘the finest story in the world’. Grish Chunder evidently doesn’t trust him when he swears he will not publish the story: ‘You cannot play with the Gods’ (304). A half-way man as so often in Kipling, caught between cultures, languages and beliefs, the narrator, in his avowed desire to ‘cheat the Lords of Life and Death’ (310), is a flawed mystagogue. Despite his condescension for Charlie, the story suggests that he too is undeserving of the great secret revealed to him. The image of the ‘treasure-house guarded by a child’, which he contemptuously applies to Charlie, to some extent applies also to him.¹⁹ Like the Gospel’s kingdom of God and Barlaam’s miraculous stone, the treasure-house is a trope of spiritual enlightenment; here, however, it is entrusted to the unenlightened. The story told in lieu of the finest story in the world is one of failure, of missed revelations: Charlie’s unfinished Greek story (his memories as a galley slave on a Greek ship) is garbled and cut short by another one of his past lives (the Viking story, in which he remembers sailing to Vinland on Thorfinn Karlsefne’s longboat); ultimately love ‘closes the door’ on memory even as it ensures the renewal of generations in the circle of reincarnation.

“‘*Beshak,*” [Grish Chunder] said, philosophically. “*Lekin darwaza band hai.*” [Without doubt. But the door is shut]’ (303). The recurring metaphor of the closed door of metempsychosis, here in vernacular expression, mirrors the opposite, euphoric image of the ‘boltless doors’ through which the poet feels confident he can go back to a childhood troped as a previous life, in the 1902 ‘Song of the Wise Children’: ‘We shall go back by the boltless doors,/ To the life unaltered our childhood knew –’²⁰

Charlie Mears, ignorant of his previous incarnations, is not a wise child but a foolish one; having tasted the love of woman he has drunk the waters of the Lethe, like the souls in Plato’s myth of Er: ‘each one as he drank forgot all things’.²¹ His ‘cryptomnesia’²² has a Platonic subtext. As for the narrator, he has glimpsed snatches of the story but failed to write it: the secret of reincarnation is protected from public revelation – from trivialisation – by the ‘Lords of Life and Death’, who will not be cheated. The door is also closed

for him. Kipling's story plays with the ancient taboo on writing: to protect the secrecy of esoteric truth, to prevent its divulging to the unworthy, sacred knowledge must be entrusted only to memory.²³

Arcane words and the vernacular in Borges's mistranslation tale

Another failure, and another missed clue, drive the plot of Borges's story 'Averroës' Search'. In Córdoba, the heart of Muslim Spain, Averroës is working on his great commentary on Aristotle when he is stumped by two incomprehensible words, 'Tragedy' and 'Comedy': 'The two arcane words were everywhere in the text of the *Poetics* – it was impossible to avoid them'.²⁴ Because, according to Borges's source (Ernest Renan's 1862 *Averroës et l'averroïsme*), Islam has no theatrical tradition, Averroës has no sense of what Aristotle is describing; he fails to 'comprehend these rather unmysterious terms so fundamental to the *Poetics*'.²⁵ Two clues, obvious to the reader, offer themselves to him, which he misses one after the other. First, he is briefly distracted by the sounds of children playing in the street under his windows. One of them plays the role of the muezzin, another of the minaret, a third, of the congregation. Averroës turns away. Later that evening, at dinner, one of the guests tells of his travels to China and of attending a play in Sin-I Kalal (Canton). He describes in some detail the seating balconies, the musicians, the masked actors on the stage. Once again Averroës pays no attention, displaying 'smug complacency' for his own culture.²⁶ Upon returning home that night, he confidently adds 'these lines to the manuscript: *Aristu* [Aristotle] gives the name 'tragedy' to panegyrics and the name 'comedy' to satires and anathemas. There are many admirable tragedies and comedies in the Qu'ran and the mu'allaqat of the mosque' (241). Averroës has missed all the clues, which seem so obvious to the reader.

The cultural blindness and deafness at the heart of the story is bound up with the linguistic issue of the vernacular: 'Averroës listened to [the boys] arguing in the "vulgar" dialect (that is, the incipient Spanish) of the Muslim masses of the Peninsula' (236). Not only does Averroës ignore child's play as unworthy of his attention, he also exhibits contempt for the vernacular spoken by the unwashed masses of Al-Andalus. In this way he overlooks two fundamental forces of culture. First, he disregards the importance of play as a creative principle, failing to see the overlap between the rudimentary play-acting in which the boys are engaging, and the great Greek tragedies and comedies of which Aristotle wrote.²⁷ Secondly, he underestimates the role of vernacular languages in the making of cultures. The language spoken by the children, the language Averroës deems unworthy of his attention, is Mozarabic, the prevalent vernacular in many areas of Muslim Spain, a continuum of local Romance dialects heavily influenced by Arabic. Averroës fails to grasp that a new vernacular is being created: these children are in effect inventing

Spanish – the language of Cervantes, the brilliant *Siglo de Oro* theatre, and Borges himself. Perhaps, Borges suggests, his particular struggle with cultural translation (the unknown artistic forms designated by the impenetrable terms *tragedy* and *comedy*) could have been helped by a willingness to acknowledge this socially unsanctioned yet linguistically hybrid vernacular. For a cultural mediator endeavouring to import Greek philosophy into Islamic culture – to hybridise that culture – these are ironic failures indeed, as is ironic the false revelation that he experiences upon returning to his library (241). Averroës, ‘limited to the epistemological categories of his culture’,²⁸ fails to see what is hidden in plain view: the children’s crude form of drama, the Chinese theatre. His indifference to the vernacular scene staged outside his window adds a linguistic dimension to the much-commented ‘framework effect’ that drives the story.²⁹ By equating the Greek theatrical notions with distant Arabic equivalents – an interpretation analogous to a domesticating translation, in effect – Averroës proves himself blind to cultural singularity: he assumes that genres can be transposed unproblematically into a different literary context, oblivious to the fact that specific words refer to culture-specific practices.³⁰ More generally, of course, as J. D. Crossan has pointed out, Averroës is blind to the two parables the story puts in front of him: thus the story can be read as a kind of Muslim variation on the deaf and the blind of the Gospels.³¹

Borges’s story contains another indication that Averroës, buried in his books, is blind to the reality around him, and even to the evil in his own house. ‘(In the harem, the black-haired slave girls had tortured a red-haired slave girl, but Averroës was not to know that until evening)’ (241). The jarring detail, inconspicuously hidden in a parenthesis, reappears as a faint echo in the conclusion: ‘the many black-haired slave girls and the trembling red-haired slave girl’ (241). It is another thing that Averroës failed to see, as well as a sinister reminder that cultural misunderstandings can have tragic consequences in real life.

The slave’s physical and probable cultural and linguistic difference singled her out for mistreatment:³² this emblematic episode of intolerance dovetails with the longer dinner episode where broader global views of literature clash with narrower ethnocentric ones. Ironically, throughout the dinner party, discussions of multilingualism, translation and adaptation to new paradigms are everywhere: yet Averroës, although he defends an expansive view of the literary experience, proves ultimately unable or unwilling to rise above the other dignitaries’ unexamined cultural prejudice. Against those who would dismiss the value of older poets as irrelevant to contemporary readers, Averroës (expressing Borges’s own views in the matter)³³ argues that time as well as space ‘enriches poetry’ and ‘widens the circle of the verses’ (240). Hidden in the dinner conversation of these fictional Muslims from medieval Spain lies an intimately Borgesian theory of what it means to read globally. The

famous metaphor of destiny as a blind camel, invented by the sixth-century poet Zuhayr, still moves us, he argues, disputing another guest's claim that such an old image 'no longer makes us marvel'. Averroës-Borges's argument is two-fold. First, the goal of poetry is not 'to astound', but to touch readers universally: 'The image that only a single man can shape is the image that interests no man' (240), whereas the experience of destiny as 'powerful yet clumsy, innocent yet inhuman' is shared by all. Second, metaphors are strengthened, not weakened, over time: the blind camel image, which initially brought together 'two images – that of the old camel and that of destiny', today serves both 'to recall Zuhayr and to conflate our own tribulations with those of that dead Arab. The figure had two terms; today, it has four' (240). The same is true, he claims, of pre-Islamic poets who composed odes in praise of desert wells: their poetry is no less moving to a reader from Al-Andalus, who reads it on the banks of the wide Guadalquivir, and for whom water is not a rare commodity (239). Thus the local, vernacular poetry of these poets, who sang of camels and desert wells, is readable centuries later for readers inhabiting a spatially, chronologically and culturally different environment: moreover, it becomes a global experience, in which a twelfth-century Muslim philosopher, to say nothing of a twentieth-century Argentine fiction writer, connect across the 'widened circle' of time with the words of long-dead poets.

And yet, despite his capacious understanding of world poetry and the 'long-term viability'³⁴ of local poetic traditions, Averroës does not flinch when their host, the Koran scholar Faraj, disparages Chinese drama, proclaiming the superiority of the Arab model (239). Averroës's understanding of the global afterlife of local poetry does not prevent him from acquiescing in the parochial small-mindedness of his circle of learned friends. Returning home, he experiences the false revelation and makes his famous mistake (241).

Borges, then, tells the story of 'a man who sets himself a goal that is not forbidden to other men, but is forbidden to him' (241). If one clue is hidden in the vernacular of the street urchins, another is hidden in the impenetrable nonsense of a riddle. This is how Abu al-Hasan the traveller describes Chinese theatre: 'These masked ones suffered imprisonment, but no one could see the jail; they rode upon horses, but the horse was not to be seen; they waged battle, but the swords were of bamboo; they died, and then they walked again' (238–9). The self-satisfied Muslim dignitaries at the dinner party dismiss these incomprehensible shenanigans as 'the acts of madmen' (239), and Averroës pays no further attention to the (admittedly rather confusing) explanations put forward by Abu al-Hasan, whose muddled account at the dinner party is arguably 'one of the comic highpoints of the story'.³⁵ Daniel Heller-Roazen points out the affinity between slangs, vernaculars and the primeval riddle forms, which are the language of the

gods before becoming the lingo of outlaws and the stuff of children's games.³⁶ If Abu al Hasan is a poor tutor, Averroës is a poor riddle-solver.

Modern parables, failed epiphanies

Interpreting these stories of failure can take us in two different (yet intersecting, as I hope to show) directions. I wish to propose, first, an interpretation based on a generic hypothesis; secondly, a reading focused on the ways in which both stories showcase and complicate issues of local/global entanglements.

Reading Borges's 'Averroës' Search' and Kipling's 'The Finest Story in the World' as parables of misunderstanding supposes that we detect a motif common to both stories: the fallibility of communication and of intellect. Both times, the failure to achieve an epiphany hinges on the inability to decipher the vernacular as a spiritual code. Kipling's narrator comes tantalisingly close to a full revelation, thanks to his initiation by Grish Chunder, conducted in the dark tongue of the Indian vernacular, impenetrable to ordinary Londoners. Averroës's near-misses, leading to his deluded conclusion about the Greek words 'tragedy' and 'comedy', while they have an undeniable comedic side, also provide an example of the vernacular's links to dark tongues and secret knowledge. The characters' defeat is mirrored in the stories' conclusions: 'the finest story in the world would never be written', wrote Kipling, and Borges's narrator 'just when I stop believing in him, 'Averroës' disappears' (241). The feeling that his story is 'mocking' him folds the twentieth-century narrator's failure onto the medieval character's failure:

I felt that Averroës, trying to imagine what a play is without ever having suspected what a theater is, was no more absurd than I, trying to imagine Averroës yet with no more material than a few snatches from Renan, Lane, and Asín Palacios. (241)

Why, then, this focus on fallibility? It may be, as Ian Almond argues, that Borges has 'stumbled upon Edward Said's main point: that whenever Westerners write about the Orient, they invariably end up writing about themselves'.³⁷ It may be, too (if we look at the issue from the viewpoint of genre) that ambiguity is the trademark of modern parables. In another famous parable, 'The Wall and the Books', Borges ends his meditation on emperor Shih Huang Ti's incomprehensible acts (building the Great Wall; burning all the books) with this profoundly tentative statement: 'This imminence of a revelation that does not take place is, perhaps, the aesthetic fact'.³⁸ In this sense, perhaps, the shortcoming of intelligence bound up with the use of the vernacular would seem to point to an intrinsically contemporary literary experience: Borges's ironic epiphanies, 'equivocal, ambivalent, and

ultimately elusive³⁹ mirror the ‘self-lacerating irony’ of Kipling’s early Indian tales.⁴⁰

Local/global entanglements

These stories about failed revelations and East–West misunderstandings are also exemplary illustrations of the entanglement of local and global issues, and of the characters’ blindness to it. Kipling’s story thematises multilingualism and untranslatability on multiple levels. The narrator claims the story can only be told in the vernacular, yet the version we read is written in English; it is a written transcription of a tale told orally by Charlie – both operations are forms of translation. Furthermore, in the middle of it, Charlie speaks in tongues, as it were, remembering and even jotting down a sentence that he doesn’t understand:

Well, I was thinking over the story, and after a while I got out of bed and wrote down on a piece of paper the sort of stuff the men might be supposed to scratch on their oars with the edges of their handcuffs. (293)

The narrator rushes out to show the mysterious graffiti to the ‘Greek Antiquity man’ at the British museum, who deciphers Charlie’s demotic scribbles with the same scorn that Averroës felt for the ‘gross dialect’ of the children playing under his window. “So far as I can ascertain it is an attempt to write extremely corrupt Greek on the part” – here he glared at me with intention – “of an extremely illiterate – ah – person” (294). Translated by the museum scholar, it turns out to mean ‘I have been – many times – overcome with weariness in this particular employment’ (294). Astonishingly, Charlie had inadvertently guessed the true meaning of this vernacular sentence: ‘I mean it to mean “I’m beastly tired”’ (293).

In a vertiginous instance of multilingual layering, not only does the young Cockney speak and write in demotic Greek, but his complaint turns out to be a garbled line from a Longfellow sonnet about a Viking warrior, ‘The Broken Oar’, which tells of an inscription on an Icelandic oar translated as ‘Oft was I weary when I toiled at thee’.⁴¹ Memories of earlier lives and intertextual memories of earlier texts are layered in Charlie’s careless interjection. This of course signals the transition of Charlie’s half-memories from the Greek galley to the Viking longboat, and the metempsychotic confusion that precludes to his final amnesia. Moreover, the Greek vernacular also points East: it fictionalises Kipling’s own autobiographical experience of remembering sentences in Hindustani, ‘the meaning of which [he] knew not’, upon his arrival in Bombay as a young journalist in 1882.⁴²

Languages are in flux and so are the characters, in whom the local and the global are entangled whether they are aware of it or not. The contact between local and outsider, ‘We’ and ‘They’, ‘white’ and ‘black’, colonial and colonised,

imperial tongue and vernacular, is mediated by a vernacular-speaking Anglo-Indian narrator who believes in reincarnation, displaying an example of ‘bifurcated, even schizophrenic, understanding’ of East–West relations.⁴³ His informant Grish Chunder is also a go-between: an Anglicised Bengali, a beef-eating Brahmin studying in the empire’s capital on a colonial scholarship, a Babu, ‘a hybrid of East and West’.⁴⁴ The Babu, according to Neelam Srivastava, is ‘a quintessentially linguistic figure’, alienated from his native culture and language. The linguistic displacement at the heart of the story (the incongruous use of the vernacular in the City of London) ‘reveals the complexities and tensions between the English language and the Indian context’.⁴⁵

For indeed, the unspecified ‘vernacular’ in which the two men discuss Charlie’s case is not a truly autochthonous language. The term carries colonialist implications: ‘With the singular exception of Sanskrit, the British in India referred to all Indian languages as “vernaculars”, which etymologically and historically, in the context of the Roman empire, meant the languages of slaves or the conquered peoples’.⁴⁶ Much confusion attaches to the precise linguistic nature of this nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian term ‘vernacular’, which represented a ‘vague but serviceable category’.⁴⁷ It referred with ‘blithe vagueness’⁴⁸ to Urdu, Hindi, or the hybrid ‘Hindustani’, to simplified (and oral) forms of these languages or even, in Nehru’s angry words, to ‘a kind of pidgin’,⁴⁹ used to communicate with the colonised natives, such as servants, who were often from other geographical and linguistic regions, thus knew little more of this so-called vernacular than their English masters.⁵⁰ This presumably is also the case with Grish Chunder, whose mother tongue as a Bengali would not have been Urdu or Hindi or Hindustani. ‘Vernacular’, in fact, is a misnomer: it is rather a ‘transregional idiom’,⁵¹ a lingua franca constructed by the British colonial rulers.⁵² Furthermore, since the dialogue between Grish Chunder and the narrator is delocalised in London, far from India, it is doubly inappropriate and very ‘casual’ indeed (to borrow Robert Young’s title) to call it a vernacular.⁵³

The high-ceiled rooms that the trade blows through⁵⁴

‘They live over the sea,/ While We live over the way’,⁵⁵ wrote Kipling in a poem mocking parochial prejudice. Charlie Mears, the epitome of closed-minded Englishness, yet lives and works at the heart of the British empire, the City of London, not suspecting that his life as a nineteenth-century English bank clerk is entangled both with the Indian empire over the sea and his previous sea-faring lives. Still less does he understand that the mystery of his identity lies in the Eastern belief of reincarnation to which Grish Chunder, whom he disparages with a racist comment (‘What a big black brute that was!’, 306), holds the key. Unbeknownst to him the

vernacular dialogue, the lexical borrowings, insert a bit of India into the British capital. As the 'door' finally closes on Charlie's prosaic future with the shopgirl, the failure to write the finest story in the world hinges on the clerk's inability to comprehend what Jeffrey Franklin, in *The Lotus and the Lion*, termed 'the counter-invasion of the West by the East',⁵⁶ or in Bakhtinian terms, the 'verbal-ideological decentering' that occurs 'when a national culture loses its sealed-off and self-sufficient character, when it becomes conscious of itself as only one among *other* cultures and languages'.⁵⁷ More generally, Kipling's tale showcases the failure to perceive the entanglement of linguistic and cultural multiplicities, of local and global. With his 25 shillings a week and his narrow shoulders, the clerk is a poor figure of an imperial master, just as he is an ironically ordinary vessel for metaphysical revelations. If Charlie has never seen the sea,⁵⁸ the sea speaks as it were through him, an apt symbol of global empires, whether Greek, Viking or British. Charlie, however, remains a cog in the imperial machine, a lowly clerk in London just as he was a slave on the Greek galley ship, chained to his oar and bench, stuck below deck with the daylight only coming in through the portholes, like a floating version of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. In a poem written in the same year 1891, 'The English Flag', Kipling famously asks 'What should they know of England who only England know?'⁵⁹ The Empire, the ship, and the story are all too big for Charlie's understanding. (In this sense Charlie Mears is a more light-hearted version of Strickland, Kipling's famous policeman gone native: feared by the natives because he knows them too well, viewed with suspicion by the colonial authorities because of his chameleon-like abilities, Strickland in the end rejoins the fold of ordinary bureaucrats, marrying an English girl and pushing papers in a colonial office, forgetting his previous life and his knowledge of 'the slang, and the beggar's cant, and the marks, and the signs, and the drift of the under-currents').⁶⁰

In Kipling's anti-Herderian view, England is more than England, it is the Empire with all its languages and peoples. 'The Finest Story in the World' embodies this idea negatively, through a protagonist unable to grasp the multiplicity of languages, cultures and beliefs that underpins his imperial environment, or the intersection between provincial nativism and cosmopolitan internationalism that shape his and other lives. Charlie Mears is the antithesis to Kipling himself, whose 'vision of the global [is] always undergirded by the local'.⁶¹ His predicament is troped through a telephone image, an apt symbol of modern trade networks. 'The plastic mind of the bank-clerk' is compared to 'a confused tangle of other voices most like the muttered song through a City telephone in the busiest part of the day' (295).⁶² Both the London Stock Exchange trading globally by telephone, and the disembodied voices of empires past speak through the hapless Charlie.

A key episode superimposes the Viking explorer of America over the London city clerk, the Viking empire over the English empire, and the Atlantic Ocean over the river Thames. As Charlie and the narrator cross the Thames on the London Bridge, they pause to look at a steamer unloading its cargo, when a cow carried on a barge bellows. Upon hearing the cow, Charlie's face suddenly changes into that of 'a much shrewder man', and 'laughing very loudly, said: "When they heard *our* bulls bellow the Skroelings ran away!"' (301). The narrator recognises an episode from the saga of Thorfinn Karlsefne in which native Americans ('Skroelings') were terrified by the unknown animals aboard the Vikings' longboats: the uninteresting soul of Charlie Mears, he realises, contains 'half a dozen several and separate existences spent on blue water in the morning of the world!' (301).

Oceans and rivers, vital to global trade, are important backdrops to both stories. These networks of globalised transactions take us back to the Barlaam-as-merchant trope, of course, and they also connect Kipling's clerk with Borges's philosopher. Where Charlie Mears is swept up in seafaring stories, for Averroës the emblem of the Medieval empire of Al-Andalus is the Guadalquivir, the great trading river, active since Phoenician times, that connects the flourishing metropolis of Cordoba with Cairo, Tangier, and European Christendom. Uniquely positioned between the Muslim world and the Latin West, Al-Andalus was both at the edge of the Muslim West and at the centre of Mediterranean trade.⁶³ Averroës lovingly leafs through a precious copy of 'Khalil's *Kitab al-Ayn*' (236), an Arab language dictionary sent to him from Tangier, and he is reminded of the upcoming dinner party, with guests returning from Morocco and China. Even Averroës's unfortunate red-haired slave (a prized commodity from exotic Northern lands) is a product of imperial trade networks binding together distant lands and peoples.⁶⁴

'Averroës' Search' is framed by two opposite spatial experiences: the story opens with Averroës's euphoric sense of rootedness in the Andalusian world. From the delightful fountain in his garden to the banks of the Guadalquivir and the land of Spain, Averroës feels space extending harmoniously and intelligibly around him:

[F]rom some invisible courtyard came the murmur of a fountain; something in the flesh of Averroës, whose ancestors had come from the deserts of Arabia, was grateful for the steadfast presence of the water.⁶⁵ Below lay the gardens [...]; below that ran the bustling Guadalquivir; beyond the river spread the beloved city of Córdoba [...] and, encircling Córdoba [...] stretched the land of Spain [...] (235).

But the plenitude of that moment is followed at the dinner party by a symmetrical and dysphoric experience of hostile space, when Averroës listens to Abu al-Hasan talking about the 'vast deserts' separating al-Andalus from

China. ‘The fear of the grossly infinite, of mere space, mere matter, laid its hand on Averroës. He looked at the symmetrical garden; he realised that he was old, useless, unreal’ (238). No longer orderly and meaningful, the figure of the garden becomes, for a moment, merely symmetrical, undermined and threatened by the unintelligible immensity of the desert, the other figure of the labyrinth for Borges.⁶⁶ On a smaller scale, it appears, the local/global nexus can be grasped (and an ode to a well can be enjoyed on the banks of the Guadalquivir, 239): but human understanding is dwarfed and bewildered by this radically different order of magnitude, by the sheer immensity implied in Abu al-Hasan’s narrative. This moment can be read as an unhappy reversal of Goethe’s legendary discovery of the Chinese novel that led him to announce to Eckermann a utopian vision of *Weltliteratur*, a euphorically expansive vision of the universality of poetry.⁶⁷ Instead, Averroës fearfully contracts: turning away from the infinitely strange evocation of the Chinese play, he retreats into the smaller ‘circle of Islam’ (241).

Conclusion

In Borges’s story, Averroës misses the truth he seeks because he never suspects that the revelation is hidden in the younger generation’s vernacular. In ignoring the clue that offers itself to him, he favours the global, cosmopolitan tradition – the great Arabic tradition that Muslim Spain takes its cues from – over the local, vernacular, culture of the little people and new language in the making.⁶⁸ Both Borges’s ‘Averroës’ Search’ and Kipling’s ‘The Finest Story in the World’ showcase the consequences of unacknowledged multilingualism: the demotic Greek, Norse or Hindustani that flow through Charlie Mears’s English hold the secret to his extraordinary fate, the spiritual secret of universal reincarnation. Charlie Mears, who only England knows, is a living counter-example to the Herderian monolingual paradigm since his mind retains traces of other men, other languages, other histories and spaces – until a monolingual wave of amnesia washes over him.⁶⁹ His is a simpler case of a blind spot in the Saidian sense – of not seeing the global fabric of imperial England, the ‘basically uninterpreted and uncomprehended fabric’ that Edward Said warned against in *Culture and Imperialism*.⁷⁰ Things are more complicated for Averroës: the cosmopolitan language, Arabic, is only apparently the vehicle of truth, whereas the despised vernacular is the improbable vehicle of revelation. While the global reach of the Muslim empire, with its merchant ships, with its Silk Road stretching into China, sets Averroës on a course to cross-cultural understanding, the cosmopolitan language paradoxically works to prevent access to it. The characters are all entangled in a conundrum: their inability to perceive the dynamic relationship between local and global intersects their failure to decode the spiritual message sent their way. How to see both local and global together – to

think contrapuntally, if we borrow Said's metaphor⁷¹ – is the gamble these stories set up. Their characters fail, spectacularly, in their attempts to grasp the elusive nexus of local and global: perhaps the best way for the story to succeed, I want to suggest, is by fictionalising failure. The finest story in the world is best left unwritten. In the epilogue's negative epiphany Averroës disappears, and we are left staring at another face in the fictional mirror, that of 'Borges' acknowledging a similar failure: a notion misunderstood, a story that can never be written (241). The epilogue adds a final translocal displacement, in the persona of an Argentine writer – who will soon claim the entire world as his literary inheritance⁷² – writing in a radically dislocated vernacular (Argentine Spanish) the impossible story of a misreading told from the edge of the west:⁷³ such is perhaps the 'aesthetic fact' that we are presented with by way of a healing stone, who gives sight to the blind. Not a bad trade-off, after all.

Notes

1. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, with an introduction by Eamon Duffy (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 1993), p. 744.
2. Shaden M. Tageldin, 'Beyond Latinity, Can the Vernacular Speak?', *Comparative Literature*, 70.2 (2018), p. 115, 114.
3. See for example S. Tageldin, 'Beyond Latinity', p. 116; and Christian Claesson, Stefan Helgesson, and Adnan Mahmutovic, 'Publication, Circulation and the Vernacular: Dimensions of World Literary Unevenness', Introduction to the special issue of *Interventions*, 2020, Vol. 22, No. 3, 301–9, at p. 304. DOI:10.1080/1369801X.2020.1718535
4. Claesson, Helgesson and Mahmutovic, 'Publication, Circulation and the Vernacular', p. 304.
5. Claesson, Helgesson and Mahmutovic, 'Publication, Circulation and the Vernacular', p. 309.
6. Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers* (New York: Zone Books, 2013).
7. The process overlaps with the one examined by Yasemin Yildiz in the more contemporary context of migrant writers in her ground-breaking study *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 20.
8. R. Funk, 'The Parable as Metaphor', in Robert W. Funk, *Funk on Parables: Collected Essays*, ed. with an introduction by Bernard Brandon Scott (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2006), p. 46.
9. Funk, *Funk on Parables*, p. 50.
10. *The Gospel According to Mark, The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 38.
11. Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Making of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 238. On the parable as code, impenetrable to outsiders but easily explicable to insiders, see John Dominic Crossan, *Raid on the*

- Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1976), p. 114.
12. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., and Peggy McCracken, *In Search of the Christian Buddha: How an Asian Sage became a Medieval Saint* (New York: Norton, 2014).
 13. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 744. The healing stone motif, among others, passed on from the Muslim Bilawar version to the Christian Barlaam version (Lopez and McCracken, *In Search of the Christian Buddha*, pp. 65–7).
 14. Ros Ballaster (ed.), *Fables of the East: Selected Tales, 1662–1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 12.
 15. Claesson, Helgesson and Mahmutovic, ‘Publication, Circulation and the Vernacular’, p. 305.
 16. See Efraín Kristal’s analysis of Borges’s version in *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), pp. 34–5.
 17. Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Finest Story in the World’, *The Man Who Would Be King*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Jan Montefiore (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), p. 288.
 18. Uriel Weinreich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010 [1953]),
p. 3; also quoted in S. S. Azfar Husain, *The Indianness of Rudyard Kipling: A Study in Stylistics* (London: Cosmic Press, 1983), p. 86.
 19. ‘Conceive yourself at the door of the world’s treasure-house guarded by a child – an idle irresponsible child playing knuckle-bones – on whose favour depends the gift of the key, and you will imagine one half my torment’ (p. 300).
 20. ‘Song of the Wise Children’, *Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling* (Wordsworth Poetry Library, 2001), p. 96.
 21. Plato, *The Republic X 621b*, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 844.
 22. On the interest for cryptomnesia (hidden memory) in medical and spiritualist circles at the turn of the century see Robert Wilcocks, *Mousetraps and the Moon: The Strange Ride of Sigmund Freud and the Early Years of Psychoanalysis* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2000), p. 225.
 23. On the fear of divulging and profanation, see Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues*, p. 100–1 and Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 9.
 24. Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Averroës’ Search’, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 236.
 25. E. Joseph Sharkey, ‘The Comedy of Language in Borges’ “La busca de Averroës”’, *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 60.1 (2006), pp. 53–69, at p. 53.
 26. Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, p. 24.
 27. Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, pp. 23–4.
 28. Jon Stewart, ‘Borges on Language and Translation’, *Philosophy and Literature*, 19.2 (1995), pp. 320–9, at p. 327.
 29. On the Popperian notion of ‘framework effect’ that inhibits crosscultural understanding see Silvia Dapía, ‘The Myth of the Framework in Borges’s “Averroës’ Search”’ (*Variaciones Borges* 7 [1999], pp. 146–65).

30. In a way, the situation in Borges's short story is the reverse of what Itamar Even-Zohar described in his polysystem theory: the literary system into which Averroës is attempting to import the foreign notions, medieval Arabic literature, is not a young or peripheral one but a mature and established one, and as such more resistant to accommodating translated forms. See Even-Zohar, 'The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem', in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 200–1.
31. Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, p. 24.
32. For a reading of the tortured slave detail in the context of Borges's stance against antisemitism see my earlier article: 'In Praise of Mistranslation: The Melancholy Cosmopolitanism of Jorge Luis Borges', *Romanic Review*, 98.2/3 (2007), pp. 205–23, at pp. 211–4.
33. Most notably in his 'Ars poetica', *Selected Poems*, ed. Alexander Coleman (Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 136–7.
34. Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature, from Antiquity to the Present Day* (London: Verso Books, 2015), p. 246.
35. Sharkey, p. 62. For Sharkey Averroës is best understood as a comic, not a tragic, hero (p. 65). Conversely, Daniel Balderston reads the story as a tragedy of the intellect: see 'Borges: The Argentine Writer and the "Western" Tradition', in Evelyn Fishburn (ed.), *Borges and Europe Revisited* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1998), pp. 37–48, at p. 44.
36. Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues*, p. 82.
37. Ian Almond, 'Borges the Post-Orientalist: Images of Islam from the Edge of the West', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 50.2 (2004), pp. 435–59, at p. 451.
38. J. L. Borges, 'The Wall and the Books', *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 346 (translation modified).
39. Evelyn Fishburn, 'This Imminence of a Revelation: A Study of Epiphanies in Borges's Fiction', *Hidden Pleasures in Borges's Fictions* (Pittsburgh: Borges Center, University of Pittsburgh, 2015), p. 173.
40. Alexander Lyon MacFie, 'Kipling and Orientalism', *Kipling Journal*, 80.317 (2006), pp. 46–53, at p. 52.
41. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'The Broken Oar', *Poems and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 2000), p. 651.
42. On this famous episode recounted in *Something of Myself*, see H. Trivedi, 'Kipling's "Vernacular": What He Knew of It – and What He Made of It', in Jan Montefiore (ed. and introd.), *In Time's Eye: Essays on Rudyard Kipling* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 182, as well as Husain, *The Indianness of Rudyard Kipling*, p. 7. Further proof of the autobiographical significance of the Greek vernacular episode is the fact that Kipling had carved the Longfellow line on his writing desk: see Meryl Macdonald Bendle, 'Kipling the Globe-Trotter: Part IV, Kipling's Activities in Mid-1891, and "The Finest Story in the World"', *Kipling Journal*, 72.286 (1998), pp. 14–7, at p. 15.
43. See Guiyou Huang, whose analysis of Kipling's poem 'We and They', nuances Edward Said's well-known reading of *Kim* in *Culture and Imperialism: 'Global visions and East/West intercultural communications: From Whitman to Kipling to Friedman'*, *Comunicación y Sociedad*, no. 24, (2015), p. 161–86, at p. 166.
44. As Kipling defines Hurree Babu in *Kim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 239.

45. Neelam Srivastava, “‘Pidgin English or Pigeon Indian?’: Babus and Babuisms in Colonial and Postcolonial Fiction’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 43.1 (2007), pp. 55–64, at p. 56.
46. Trivedi, ‘Kipling’s Vernacular’, p. 180.
47. Douglas Kerr, *Eastern Figures: Orient and Empire in British Writing* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), p. 6.
48. Trivedi, ‘Kipling’s Vernacular’, p. 179.
49. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: Bodley Head, 1989 [1936]), p. 452; quoted in Trivedi, ‘Kipling’s Vernacular’, p. 193.
50. Trivedi, ‘Kipling’s Vernacular’, p. 181.
51. S. McGregor, ‘The Progress of Hindi, Part 1: The Development of a Transregional Idiom’, in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 912–57.
52. On Hindustani (‘the vernacular’) as lingua franca see Trivedi, ‘Kipling’s Vernacular’, p. 180, and Husain, *The Indianness of Rudyard Kipling*, p. 8. For a more recent reassessment of the complex colonial history of Hindi and Urdu as mediated through Western political and linguistic parameters see Aamir Mufti’s *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 117–30.
53. Robert J. C. Young, ‘That Which Is Casually Called a Language’, *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 131.5 (2016), pp. 1207–21.
54. ‘We shall go back by the boltless doors,/ To the life unaltered our childhood knew –/ To the naked feet on the cool, dark floors,/ And the high-ceiled rooms that the Trade blows through’ (‘Song of the Wise Children’, *Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, p. 96).
55. ‘We and They’, *Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, pp. 790–1. On G. Huang’s interpretation of this poem, see note 43.
56. Jeffrey Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 7.
57. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 370; quoted by Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion*, p. 8.
58. As ‘a little chap’ he went to Brighton once (p. 292).
59. ‘The English Flag’, *Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, p. 233.
60. ‘Miss Youghal’s Sais’, *Plain Tales from the Hills*, ed. and introd. Kaori Nagai (Penguin Books, 2011), p. 28. On Strickland’s promotion through ignorance see Kerr, *Eastern Figures*, pp. 230–6.
61. Alexander Bubb, ‘The Provincial Cosmopolitan: Kipling, India and Globalization’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 49.4 (2013), p. 391–404, at p. 393.
62. On Kipling’s fascination for gadgets mechanical and electrical see Wilcocks, *Mousetraps and the Moon*, p. 222.
63. Olivia R. Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain: The Commercial Realignment of the Iberian Peninsula, 900–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) (see especially pp. 1–22).
64. On the slave trade in Al-Andalus (particularly the costly white boys and girls from Northern and Slavic countries), see Constable, *Trade and Traders*, pp. 204–5, as well as A. Martín Casares and Maria C. Delaigue, *Cautivas y*

esclavas: el tráfico humano en el Mediterráneo (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2016), p. 10.

65. The unconscious – genetic – affinity to water is another feature uniting Borges's and Kipling's characters. It also sets the stage for Averroës's later defense of pre-Islamic poetry.
66. As evidenced for example by the parable 'The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths', *Collected Fictions*, pp. 263–4.
67. For a critical re-assessment of this legendary discovery, see Zhang Longxi, 'The Relevance of *Weltliteratur*', *Poetica*, 45.3/4 (2013), pp. 241–7.
68. See S. Pollock, 'Cosmopolitanism, vernacularism, and premodernity', in Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (eds.), *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 59–80, at p. 60.
69. Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother tongue*, pp. 6–10.
70. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 20.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
72. 'The Argentine Writer and Tradition', *Selected Non-Fictions*, p. 427.
73. Almond, 'Borges the Post-Orientalist', p. 451. On Borges's 'transnational and inclusive' model of Argentine culture, see also Robin Fiddian, *Postcolonial Borges: Argument and Artistry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 178.

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