

Triśaṅku's Heaven: Translation Zone

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Abstract: Hindi poet Ajñeya's essay "Rūṛhi aur Mauliktā" in the 1945 collection *Triśaṅku: Literature in the Age of Revolutionary Struggle* expresses a distinct philosophy of translation that not only illuminates the life and literary career of its author, but also provides a model for translation practice that takes untranslatability as a point of departure. This essay builds on existing scholarship to present a new reading of Ajñeya's quasi-translation of T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," placing it within the larger framework of Hindi's history, and foregrounding difficult questions about the uneven development of criticism and theory in different languages. Through this reading, the mythological figure of Triśaṅku emerges as a mascot for translation — and his ultimate location, which was also Ajñeya's, as an illustration of what Emily Apter calls a translation zone.

Keywords: Ajñeya, Triśaṅku, T.S. Eliot, Hindi modernism, Hindi literary criticism, translation

The Hindi revolutionary poet Ajñeya (1911–1987) and T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) had one thing in common: an interest in chemistry. In an otherwise intrepid translation of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Ajñeya stays close to the letter in the famous passage that describes poetry as "the action which takes place when a bit of finely filleted platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide" (Eliot 39).¹ This moment of fidelity may suggest that Ajñeya and Eliot shared an understanding of *poesis* as the interaction of certain elements; but one was more interested in the resulting explosions than the other. Ajñeya's involvement in India's struggle against British colonialism included "the production of a large number of bombs in a factory set up in Delhi (under the name Himalayan Toilet Products) where his knowledge of chemistry proved especially valuable" (Trivedi, "Shekhar" 80). In contrast, Eliot famously described himself as a "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion" (*For Lancelot Andrews* ix). On a biographical level, these two thinkers seem to have had very little in common. Why did Ajñeya choose to translate Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and how can one account for the style and texture of his translation? In addressing this question, this essay seeks to make three interventions. The first is with regard to the existing scholarship on Ajñeya, which has seen him as poet, novelist, journalist, soldier, revolutionary (the list goes on), but not as a thinker on translation.² The second is to reanimate a forgotten figure from an Indian myth — Triśaṅku, after whom Ajñeya's book is named — and to read that myth in a new way, as an allegory of translation. The third is to expand the conversation on translation and untranslatability by introducing these two figures — one historical, one mythical — to it.

Ajñeya's essay

Ajñeya's essay "Rūṛhi aur Mauliktā" ("Tradition and Originality")³ is a strange piece of writing. In its vocabulary and three-part structure, it mirrors Eliot's "Tradition and the

Individual Talent,” and refers to Eliot by name in the body of the essay (which would be highly unusual in any translation), but also occasionally gives up on translation by choosing to include certain passages in English, in the Roman script.⁴ On the level of style, its rough and repetitive quality is unexpected, given Ajñeya's reputation as a literary stylist. On the level of content, there are noteworthy departures from Eliot's essay. For instance, instead of translating Eliot's comments on British society into Hindi, Ajñeya chooses to present his own views on contemporary Indian society. Sometimes, he supplements Eliot's metaphors with his own.⁵ He surpasses Eliot in his descriptions of the trembling present moment in which the past is always reflected.⁶ It seems as though Ajñeya is attempting to make Eliot speak in Hindi; or rather to speak Eliot in Hindi. It is almost like plagiarism, except that the source is both obvious and explicitly acknowledged. This confusion reaches its peak when Ajñeya's translation discourages poets from seeking out new experiences that will only lead to debauchery.⁷ Since Ajñeya was the author of novels that were considered indecent — Harish Trivedi has called him Hindi's D.H. Lawrence (“Shekhar” 80) — what can we call this if not parody? In this essay, Ajñeya seems like an actor putting on a costume and becoming familiar with a new role, improvising when the fancy takes him, testing out different tones and registers; constantly slipping between citing and being.

But why was this young radical interested in the politically conservative T.S. Eliot? This was not just any young writer, but one who had spent five years in prison for his involvement in revolutionary activities (Govind 110). In “A Hundred Years of T.S. Eliot's ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent,’” Kevin Dettmar describes Eliot's essay as “the most influential English-language literary essay of the twentieth century . . . the criticism that critics read when they're figuring out that they want to be critics.” In this context, it would make sense for a young writer beginning a career in criticism to turn to Eliot for inspiration. This is a partial explanation that will have to be elaborated by means of another concern: what was the special significance of translating Eliot's most famous critical essay into Hindi?

Hindi is a young language. It became a medium of instruction, recognisable in its current standardised form, only in the late 19th century (McGregor, vii). A discernible literary tradition began in 20th century, and criticism is younger still (Prakash). While Sanskrit, considered the root of Hindi, is one of the oldest philosophical languages in the world, one could argue that Hindi's life as a language of theory and philosophy has only just begun. Compared to other Indian languages, philosophy and theory in translation seem to have reached Hindi with some difficulty. The scholar-translator Prabhakar Machwe observed in 1967 that when he attempted to write an essay in Hindi on Nietzsche in 1935,

there was not a single book in Hindi on Kant, while in Bengali there were two books on his philosophy. Three of Russell's books have been translated into Malayalam, and in Urdu there is a translation of Husserl from the original German. What is true about philosophy is more or less true about other sciences, especially as regards rhetorics, aesthetics, literary criticism, etc. (69).

Machwe's account allows us to read Ajñeya's translation of Eliot — who provided a model not only of literary success, but critical force — as an attempt to address the lack of a critical or scholarly conversation in the world of Hindi letters.

Perhaps this is because unlike Bangla, Urdu and Malayalam, modern Hindi was more of an invented language. In order to achieve its current standardised form, it had to cast off its links with Brajbhasha, which had a fully-fledged literary tradition, including a number of treatises in poetics. “The movement from Brajbhasha to Khari Boli served

to cut [Hindi] off substantially from its accumulated literary idiom and tradition and its grassroots vitality” (Trivedi, “The Progress of Hindi, Part 2” 1016). An experimental energy fueled a period of great creativity as canons of poetry and fiction were invented in this new medium. Ajñeya’s essay suggests that a philosophical idiom may have been slower to develop. He admits in his introduction to this collection of essays that he has made no attempt to be original; the essays are inspired by the absence of certain theories and ideas in Hindi, by the lack of a framework of critique and evaluation. It is as if, having found no existing models for this kind of work in Hindi, he attempts to introduce it from the outside, like “a bit of finely filleted platinum...into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide” (Eliot 39).

Despite Ajñeya’s efforts, the lack of a vibrant philosophical discourse in Hindi appears to persist. Leading contemporary critic Apoorvanand’s most recent book, *Sāhitya Kā Ekānt* (*The Solitude of Literature*), describes a crisis in the field of Hindi literary theory. With the immense critical energy of the 1960s and ‘70s having dimmed, Apoorvanand argues that Hindi writers today are interested in criticism or reviews only to the extent that they advertise their new books; criticism is therefore no longer autonomous — it is no longer a matter of life and death (8). If one were to read Apoorvanand alone, one would not be struck by a lack of Hindi participation in international conversations on philosophy and aesthetics. In the space of one essay (the second one in the volume), he cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty (25), Miroslav Holub (27), Leon Trotsky (27), Christopher Caldwell (28), Stéphane Mallarmé (28), Karl Marx (31), Nizaar Kabbani (32), Louis Althusser (34), and Jacques Lacan (35). In this regard, however, it would be safe to think of Apoorvanand as the exception rather than the rule. In fact, it is clear that in making these citational choices, he reflects the same concerns as Ajñeya. “Rūḥi aur Mauliktā” is valuable not because it demonstrates a confident critical voice, to which Apoorvanand comes closer, but because it showcases the search for one: it is a moment of exploratory ventriloquism.

In Ajñeya’s struggle between tradition and innovation, we see him impishly mimicking the most prestigious existing model for literary critical success, while simultaneously practicing what may have been a pre-colonial mode of translation: repeating in order to explain or annotate. Sheldon Pollock writes in the introduction to *World Philology* that while “there is evidence of frequent and varied translation into and out of Sanskrit and other languages, we find no reflection on the practice in any South Asian intellectual tradition before colonialism (even in the Indo-Persian world, despite the massive translation project undertaken by the early Mughal court), not even the terms by which to describe it” (16). In Pollock’s view, this lack of a label suggests the degree to which translation was fundamental to, and constitutive of, Indian knowledge systems, which did not have a word for philology either. In their book *Post-Colonial Translation*, Bassnett and Trivedi describe “anuvād” as “the word for translation in Sanskrit,” which may therefore be a problematic characterisation, but correctly go on to say that it

etymologically and primarily means ‘saying after or again, repeating by way of explanation, explanatory repetition or reiteration with corroboration or illustration, explanatory reference to anything already said’ (Monier-Williams 1997:38). (One of the early Sanskrit uses of the word in this sense occurs in the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* in a passage which T.S. Eliot picked up for use in the last section of *The Waste Land*; Eliot’s ‘What the Thunder Said’ is, in the Sanskrit source, strictly speaking What the Thunder Translated/Repeated... (9).

This background brings us closer to understanding what Ajñeya was trying to do with, and to, Eliot in “Rūḥi Aur Mauliktā.” This pre-colonial understanding of anuvād (or what we now call translation), with its emphasis on temporal rather than spatial transfer,

is closer perhaps to Walter Benjamin's notion of translation as "afterlife" (71) than it is to translation as synchronic transformation. Saying-after is a useful rubric for translation because it provides a horizon beyond fidelity, and highlights questions of contemporary reception and our living relationship with texts from the past.

Ajñeya's life (a longer essay)

The associations of the word "essay" with the French "essayer" (to try, or attempt), and the old English "assay" (to weigh, measure, or ascertain), allow us to make the leap from a piece of writing to a life. Translators are drawn to tasks in which success is not guaranteed (where, in fact, abject failure is more likely), and are moved to weigh one word against another, one language against another, even one world against another.⁸ The word "assay" may have fallen out of common usage, but, in a happy continuation of an earlier motif, it is still used in chemical fields in the sense of making an experiment, "the trial of metals, by 'touch,' fire, etc.; the determination of the quantity of metal in an ore or alloy" (OED Online). If culture can be thought of as a means of measuring and assigning value, then literary translation is a similar negotiation not only with particular measurements, but with the units of measurement.⁹ Thus two whole cultures, whose means of measuring may not align, are brought into confrontation by those who live somehow in both cultures, and are inspired to translate.

Around the time that this first collection of essays was published, Ajñeya was considered both the Eliot and the Pound of Hindi poetry (Trivedi, "Ajñeya" 80). What does it mean to "be" the Eliot, the Pound, the Lawrence of a certain language, and not just to be the translator of their works? Salman Rushdie has, in a different context, described postcolonial writers as "translated men" (17). Translation, then, is not merely a literary activity, but one that extends to metaphysical and political being. Translation involves difficult choices and imperfect outcomes. Ajñeya's life involved a number of such decisions. One, for instance, was enrolling in the British army during World War II. Why would an active member of the Indian independence movement volunteer to fight on behalf of an imperial army? Such a decision cannot be understood within a bipolar framework of colonial struggle. Ajñeya saw himself as participating in larger international events, in which India's relationship with the British empire was only one part of the picture. His reason for joining the British army was that the greater evil of fascism in Germany had to be actively resisted (Trivedi, "Shekhar" 81). One had to "[take] responsibility and action in a situation of global crisis, rather than just discussing idealized conceptions of perfect nationalist or revolutionary action" (Govind 129).

Therefore, one's identity as anti-colonial or revolutionary emerges as contingent and only relationally defined. In order to understand these translated lives and living relationships, one rubric or framework is rarely sufficient. We have to take into account several different points of view in order to begin to appreciate these choices. In other words, we have to translate; we have to simultaneously consider more than one value system. If Ajñeya's Sanskritised prose style, his invocation of Eliot, his enrolment in the British army seem to water down his revolutionary commitments, it is also true that he chose to remain a Hindi writer all his life, although he could have easily stepped into the limelight of Anglophone literary culture if he chose. Even after he started teaching at the University of California in Berkeley, Hindi literature was his chosen creative world, in which he experimented with almost every conceivable form, genre and medium. Like the mythological figure Triṣaṅku, Ajñeya experienced many opposing pulls in his literary career — for instance, some critics thought he was too Western, others that he was too uncritical of the East (Trivedi, "The Progress of Hindi" 1013) — and his being was invested in these conflicts.

“Rūḥi aur Maulikṭā” is a translation in the way that each live performance of a piece of music is a translation of that piece. It is also critical in the way that “each performance of a symphony . . . is also a critique of that symphony. Unlike the reviewer, however, the performer ‘invests his own being in the process of interpretation’” (Dyer 184). In translating Eliot, Ajñeya was not only mimicking him, he was actively practicing critique. His translation is ambiguous: one cannot tell when he speaks as himself and when he speaks as Eliot, one cannot tell when he is sincere and when he is joking. And it is especially ironic that in an essay about the necessity of respecting tradition, one cannot be sure to which tradition he refers: Hindi was still in the process of building a canon, and the Anglophone tradition was that of the coloniser — against whom he was involved in activities as antagonistic as bomb-making. Against which tradition could he be evaluated?

It is fruitful to reflect, in this context, on his pen name. It was a name he did not choose, and one that he always hated for its mystical connotations; it was chosen for him by Premchand (an esteemed figure in the Hindi literary scene) after it was suggested that he use a pseudonym to avoid the scrutiny of British authorities (Trivedi, “Shekhar” 79). The word “ajñeya” means “unknowable,” and evokes an impenetrability, a secrecy. It evokes that which resists comprehension, and eludes translation. The Hindi word for “agnostic” is “ajñeyavādī,” someone who claims that the existence or nonexistence of God cannot be known, but also, one whose speech is with regard to the unknown. It is an uncommon word, and difficult to pronounce even for the native speaker. In a noteworthy instance of untranslatability, the nasal consonant *jña* “cannot be correctly conveyed by any combination of the Roman alphabet.”¹⁰ That the writer had mixed feelings about his *nom-de-plume* is fitting; we are not able to fix a final meaning or connotation onto a word always withdrawing into obscurity. Originating in a context of secrecy, conflict and resistance, the name marks the necessity and impossibility of translation: one cannot know for certain, but one speaks; one is unable to speak as oneself and so one speaks as another; in order to speak one’s mind, one takes on a name about which one is, at best, ambivalent.

“Rūḥi aur Maulikṭā” is an isolated instance of translation that allows us to perceive a larger and more diffuse pattern. Whether it was in the domain of literature or in the war zone, Ajñeya did not seem to consider the incommensurability of cultures an obstacle to translation. It was instead the cornerstone of a lifetime committed to translation. His choices cannot be understood from within one framework alone; one has to look simultaneously at worlds that do not perfectly map onto each other: indigenous commentarial practices and Anglophone modernism, anticolonial struggle in India and alliance with the colonial master against fascism in Germany. These are choices characterised by constant negotiation, compromise, and discernment of a terrain that is always shifting, where one’s knowledge is therefore always incomplete — and yet one must act and speak.

Triśaṅku

It is in this spirit, arguably, that Ajñeya named his first book of essays after the mythological figure Triśaṅku.¹¹ To summarise the myth as it appears in Sargas 56–60 in the *Bālakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*: Triśaṅku was a king who wished to go to heaven with his mortal body, which was against the natural order of things. When his family priest, Vasiṣṭha, refused to help him, he approached Vasiṣṭha’s sons, who cursed him to become a caṇḍāla: “He became black and coarse, with black garments and unkempt hair. His ornaments were of iron, his garlands and ointment from the cremation ground” (233). Unrecognisable to his people, the king approaches Viśvāmītra, a rival ascetic,

who agrees to help him. Viśvāmitra succeeds in sending Triśaṅku towards the heavens, but the gods, who do not want him, send him hurtling back down, and Triśaṅku is suspended in mid-air between heaven and earth. An enraged Viśvāmitra starts to create a new universe for Triśaṅku, with new constellations, and even new gods. The existing gods, threatened and alarmed, manage to pacify Viśvāmitra, and convince him to leave Triśaṅku hanging upside down in his partial heaven (231–238).

What Triśaṅku wants is impossible. He wants existence in another realm without having undergone any change himself, without having paid, as it were, the price of admission. Insofar as language is seen to bear not only lexicons, but entire worlds, the ontological dimension of Triśaṅku's desire only makes this more apt as a story of translation. It is no ordinary frontier that he seeks to cross, but the final, fundamental one: that of death itself. One is reminded of Ariel's description of Ferdinand's dead father in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

Nothing of him doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange (36).

Even when death is not imagined as nonexistence, it appears to involve a transformation (corporeal or otherwise) into something that cannot be translated. This is no impediment to Triśaṅku's desire — or perhaps the radical nature of the wish is precisely what makes it irresistible. A promise will be made to him that his wish can come true, but it is realised only in a partial way, in a heaven that is incomplete; and he is in fact forced to change in ways he could never have imagined.

The myth has obvious parallels with the story of Dedalus, but evokes a realm that is neither here nor elsewhere — excessive, even slightly comical — where a certain kind of person (a translator?) might reside.¹² Three elements of this story are particularly striking. First, that Triśaṅku will not go to heaven in his kingly body, but in the lowest and most reviled body in the system of caste (*Rāmāyaṇa* 58.4). Second, this entire episode takes place in an affective nexus of envy, greed, and pride — Triśaṅku is little more than a pawn in the long drawn out power struggle between rival ascetics Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra. His impertinent ascension is orchestrated by those who don't have permission, or aren't quite the right people for job: "How can the gods and seers in a sacrificial assembly partake of the offerings of a man whose sacrificial priest is a kshatriya, especially when he himself is a pariah?" (58.14). Finally, in a point related to the overreach just described, there is a dissatisfaction so deep with the givenness of the world that these characters are able to change it, albeit with completely unexpected results and at great personal cost. This is Triśaṅku's plea to Viśvāmitra: "Please try through human effort to overcome the power of fate" (57.23).

The desire for translation is a desire for the impossible: one cannot enter a language (a world) while still being 'within' another language (another world), and yet without the impulse to do so there can be no translation. If one is able to cross over to another language, by sheer desire and application, one cannot do so in the pristine form of the original language, but only having become unrecognisable both to oneself and to one's people. The result is to be caught in a limbo between two languages, in a new world that could not have existed prior to this specific interaction, this conflict. Triśaṅku's heaven, then, is what Emily Apter calls a translation zone, where,

cast as an act of love, and as an act of disruption, translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements. It is a truism that the experience of becoming proficient in another tongue delivers a salubrious blow to

narcissism, both national and individual. Translation failure demarcates intersubjective limits, even as it highlights that ‘eureka’ spot where consciousness crosses over to a rough zone of equivalency or crystallizes around an idea that belongs to no one language or nation in particular (6).

The mythological Triśaṅku is a worthy mascot for translators because rather than symbolising arrival, the conclusion of the famous “carrying across” of *translatio*, he typifies incompleteness, far-fetched ambitions and unforeseen consequences. This is either a cautionary tale or a very inspiring one: Triśaṅku’s final fate may have been to hang upside down as a pariah in the sky, but he is still a source of illumination. The Triśaṅku constellation, known also as the Southern Cross, is the smallest of the eighty-eight recognised constellations, but it is also one of the brightest (“Crux Constellation”).

Translation

In recent scholarly conversations, the concept of untranslatability has been marshalled against the flattening and diminishing impact of globalisation, and against an unthinking attitude that sees all languages as equal, or equally available to the comparatist. This concept, therefore, marks a necessary and urgent intervention. However, it is important to acknowledge, as Apter does in a prefatory remark in *The Dictionary of Untranslatables*, that, taken to an extreme, an absolutist and mystical attitude towards the nonequivalence of languages “[neglects]...the fact that some pretty good equivalencies are available” (xiv). As the Triśaṅku myth — and the life of Ajñeya — suggest, there is a desire for translation in spite of and because of its impossibility; the fact that perfect translation is impossible is not something that should make us stop, but one that allows us to begin.

“Rūrhi aur Mauliktā” gives us an occasion to think about the non-equivalence of languages, because it seems to have been inspired and brought about by an interest in what this non-equivalence makes possible. The breach that one confronts is not merely lexical, but also conceptual, and ultimately political. In the essay “The Hindi Postcolonial—Categories and Configurations” Harish Trivedi underscores the irony of a postcolonial discourse that takes place entirely in English, with its headquarters in American universities. “It remains debatable whether either postcolonial discourse as currently constituted or Hindi literature has anything to gain from the other” (400). It is strange that literature in Indian languages about the independence struggle does not constitute a significant part of any postcolonial canon or tradition. It is as if the category “postcolonial” does not exist in the Hindi language. What is this if not a translation problem?

A more robust translation culture allowing theoretical conversations across languages would be wonderful; but it is necessary to pause and consider the causes for these astonishing incompatibilities. One has to ask to what extent Hindi is at a loss without a theoretical discourse on post-colonialism, or theoretical discourse *tout court*. Hindi has the unique distinction of being considered both the language of an independence struggle and a hegemonic language in the subcontinent (Trivedi, “The Progress of Hindi, Part 2” 959). English has certainly not given up its imperial position by virtue of having a postcolonial discourse; if anything, Trivedi and others argue that it has only used this discourse to accrue more power to itself. It is a confusion of categories, made visible by translation, that allows us to understand this. One must take the time to appreciate the ways in which languages differ; after all these differences are what make translation possible.

Ajñeya’s example leads us to consider other potential mediums for Comparative Literature than English, and to wonder whether this discipline could exist without “Theory” in English and other European languages. What might that discipline look

like? Ajñeya nudges us to ask this question, to ask if other worlds — other ridiculous heavens — are possible. He reminds us to assume this task without falling prey to essentialism or an uncritical nationalism, and to laugh at ourselves all the while. Ajñeya places himself in Triśaṅku's heaven, in that outlawed confusion of categories, even if it involves what looks like compromise, because it is better than doing nothing and saying nothing. If we wish to find reasons to forgive him for taking up Eliot, we need only think of their shared interest in chemical reactions, and the different routes that passion took in their lives. This brings to mind Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem," especially in the context of Ajñeya's later novels that expressed a disenchantment with what independent India looked like:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Dreams explode, and reckless stunts have accidental, cosmic outcomes, in the translation zone. "Rūṛhi aur Mauliktā" is an invitation to be more bold, not less, in the face of confused categories. Having put aside the fear of failure, we can start to fail in more luminous ways.

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Notes

¹ This is Ajñeya's translation: "अंग्रेजी कवि-आलोचक टी. एस. इलियट ने इस क्रिया की तुलना एक रसायनिक क्रिया से की है। सल्फर डायक्साइड और आक्सीजन से भरे हुए पात्र में यदि प्लाटिनम का चूर्ण प्रविष्ट किया जाये, तो वे दोनों गैसें मिलकर सल्फ्यूरस एसिड में प्रवर्तित हो जाती हैं। यह क्रिया प्लाटिनम की उपस्थिति के बिना नहीं होती, तथापि बननेवाले अम्ल में प्लाटिनम का कोई अंश नहीं होता, न प्लाटिनम में किसी प्रकार का कोई परिवर्तन ही दीखता है — वह ज्यों-का-त्यों पड़ा रह जाता है।" (37).

² Rupert Snell's wonderful close readings in the 1993 essay "Ajneya Translates Ajneya: The Nilambari Poems" do not quite constitute an exception. The essay showcases all that is lost in translation from Hindi to English, but its focus is Ajñeya's poems and the practice of translation. There is no consideration here of an Ajñeyan philosophy of translation.

- ³ The word “mauliktā” is derived from “mūla,” which means root or foundation, and is therefore surprisingly close to “tradition” for a title that seeks to differentiate tradition from originality. However, given that a root can symbolise a lineage as well as a fresh beginning, it is by no means inappropriate. I am grateful to M.J. Ernst for the observation that the word “origin” contains the same ambiguity. In his translation, Ajñeya describes a lack of tradition as a deracination. The figure of the root therefore aligns both with tradition and with originality in Ajñeya’s thought. This figure does not appear in Eliot’s essay.
- ⁴ Only in first introduction to the collection does one find that the author describes it as “lagbhag bhāvānuvād,” a sort-of/approximate translation of the sense of Eliot’s essay.
- ⁵ This image of a crucible follows his translation of the above-mentioned reaction between sulphur dioxide and oxygen:
 “एक दूसरी उपमा की शरण लें तो कवि का मन एक भट्टी है जिसके ताप में विभिन्न धातुएँ पिघलकर एकरस हो जाती हैं। ढली हुई धातु विभिन्न तत्वों से बनी है, उनमें से कुछ धातुएँ स्वयं भट्टी के स्वामी की संपत्ति भी हो सकती हैं, तथापि भट्टी के स्वामी से भट्टी का, और भट्टी से धातु का अलगाव और स्वतंत्र अस्तित्व अक्षुण्ण बना रहता है (37-38).”
 (To use another simile, the poet’s mind is like a furnace, in the heat of which various metals melt and become one. This new metal is made from various other metals, some of which may have belonged to the owner of the furnace, but the separation between the furnace and its owner, and the furnace and the metals, remains intact.)
- ⁶ Here he displays a Benjaminian sensibility in his philosophy of time. Walter Benjamin was interested in ways of recuperating the past without recourse to nostalgia: a critical framework that would allow one to understand how one has arrived at one’s current moment; the Arcades Project is an illustration of this approach. As Terry Eagleton writes in an essay on Benjamin, “Those who wipe out the past are in danger of abolishing the future as well. Nobody was more intent on eradicating the past than the Nazis...” <https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2009/11/past-benjamin-future-obama>
- ⁷ “काव्य में नूतनता — और बिना नूतनता के कला कहाँ है — लाने के लिए कवि को नूतन अनुभव खोजने की आवश्यकता नहीं है। ऐसी खोज — नूतन मानवीय अनुभूतियाँ प्राप्त करने की लहक — उसे मानवीय वासनाओं के विकृत रूपों की ओर ही ले जाएगी, और उस पर पुष्ट होनेवाला साहित्य या काव्य विकृति (perversity) का ही सहित्य होगा। कवि का कार्य नये अनुभवों की, नये भावों की खोज नहीं है, प्रत्युत पुराने और परिचित भावों के उपकरण से ही ऐसी नूतन अनुभूतियों की सृष्टि करना जो उन भावों से पहले प्राप्त नहीं की जा चुकी हैं (39).”
 (In order to be original — and what is art without originality? — the poet does not have to go in search of new experiences. This search — the blazing desire for new human experiences — will take him in the direction of perversity and lust, and the literature that feeds on that will only be the literature of perversity. The task of the poet is not to hunt for new experiences or emotions, rather, by means of well-known experiences to create new perceptions which had not been done before with those emotions.)
 At the end of this paragraph, Ajñeya describes the kind of chemist a poet ought to be: “he is not the discoverer of new elements; his success and greatness lies in generating miracles by developing new compounds from known elements.” The Hindi text: “वह नयी धातुओं का शोधक नहीं है; हमारी जानी हुई धातुओं से ही नया योग ढालने में और उससे नया चमत्कार उत्पन्न करने में उसकी सफलता और महानता है।” (39).
- ⁸ The idea that a language, with its epistemological horizons, bears an entire world, or worldview, has come up repeatedly in recent thought on language, articulated by thinkers as diverse as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (13) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (63).
- ⁹ “A lot of Chemistry is simply converting between units,” or systems of measurement; when one contemplates this process of conversion, and the complex calculations it entails, one is confronted with the arbitrary and somewhat capricious quality of our best available means of measurement (Green 0:32-3:39).
- ¹⁰ <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/jna>
- ¹¹ The book, Ajñeya tells us in his second introduction, fully lived up to this name with a publication history involving multiple delays, the outbreak of war, the scarcity of paper, the locking up of printing presses, lost pages, and much back-and-forth between censors and district magistrates.
- ¹² The fact that certain words in Ajñeya’s essay appear in English and in the Roman script, suggests that he was addressing other “translated men,” those who shared a space with him in “Triṣaṅku’s heaven.”

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