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## **Re-birth of Literature in Translation**

**Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate**

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### **Abstract**

Translation as a communicative practice is taking place around us as we are involved in interpreting the text of one language into another knowingly or unknowingly. Since literature is a kind of text, so literature of one source language is being translated into target language, from times immemorial. In the recent years literature of one country is translated into the language of another country for the purposes like familiarizing one country's or community's culture into another country or community. In the given research study the phenomenon of literature translation and its revival in translation is analyzed. The aim of the study is to find out whether a piece of literature gets a new birth after it is translated into another language or not. It highlights the factors that can contribute in giving a new life to a translated work and make it acceptable among the readers of the target language literature.

The translated version of Gabriel Garcia Marquez' "No One Writes to the Colonel" is taken for this study. The novella/short story is actually written in Spanish but translated to English by J.S.

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate

Re-birth of Literature in Translation

Bernstein. The findings led to the conclusion that it is possible for a work of literature to get a new birth in translation depending upon the factor that it should be a work of elevated themes discussing universal problems, so that the readers of the target language may find it a story of their own, because human nature remains same and does not change with time and space.

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Translation as a communicative practice is taking place around us as we are involved in interpreting the text of one language into another knowingly or unknowingly. Precisely speaking it is the transmission of source language text by means of any target language text and may take either written or verbal form. As a matter of fact translation is a process with diverse advantages and uses, and it has been and is still used for converting texts of various sorts from one source language to other target language. These texts vary from ordinary life incidents to complex scientific materials. Ascertaining the history of translation is not something that can be easily agreed upon or, it may not be wrong to say that from the time when written literature appeared, there exist translations or translated works. Due to ever increasing demand of translation Machine aided translation and Computer Aided Translation (CAT) are implied to help human translator.

Since literature is a kind of text, so literature of one source language is being translated into target language, from times immemorial. It is interesting to mention that early works in English literature are translations from other languages. In English Chaucer adapted his Knight's Tale and Troilus and Criseyde from Boccaccio's Filostrato and Teseida respectively. Today English Literature is thronged with translated works from all over the world. One such translated work is that of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's short story/novella "No One Writes to the Colonel" translated from Spanish into English by J.S Bernstein.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate

Re-birth of Literature in Translation

Translation of text of one language into another is an ancient phenomenon. With the world turning into a global village, this translation of literature of one language of the world into the other languages has become a common practice. In the recent years literature of one country is translated into the language of another country for the purposes like familiarizing one country's or community's culture into another country or community. In the given research study the phenomenon of literature translation and its revival in translation is analyzed.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To ascertain that whether literature gets a new birth when it is translated into another language with reference to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "No One Writes to the Colonel".
2. To what extent has the translation of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "No One Writes to the Colonel" been able to support the original work's ideas, issues and problems.
3. To determine the key factors that contributed in giving revival to "No One Writes to the Colonel" in its translated version.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. Does a piece of literature get a new birth when it is translated into another language with reference to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "No One Writes to the Colonel"?
2. How has the translation of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "No One Writes to the Colonel" been able to support the original work's ideas, issues and problems?
3. What are the key factors that contributed in giving revival to "No One Writes to the Colonel" in its translated version?

### **1.5 Delimitation of the Study**

The study has been delimited to the translation of only one short story/novella of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "No One Writes to the Colonel".

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate

Re-birth of Literature in Translation

The aim of the study is to find out whether a piece of literature gets a new birth after it is translated into another language or not. Translation of one language literature into another language is a common practice; thereby the translated literature gets new audience and recognition. The study helps to find out whether literature gets new birth in translation or not. It highlights the factors that can contribute in giving a new life to a translated work and make it acceptable among the readers of the target language literature.

## **2 Review of the Related Literature**

Translation typically has been used to transfer written or spoken source language texts to equivalent written or spoken source language texts. In general, the purpose of translation is to reproduce various kinds of texts that may include religious, literary, scientific, and philosophical texts in another language and thus making them available to wider readers. Translation can either use written or oral mode as known by separate terms translation and interpreting respectively. Due to its importance, in the recent years, translation has emerged as a separate discipline by the name of translation studies.

The need for translation has been explained well by Barbe (1996) in whose opinion whenever different languages come into contact with one another the need for translation is felt. It depends on the relationship between languages and particularly on similarities and differences of prestige, power, and wealth between them. It is a fact that more translations take place from the language of a wealthy and powerful nation into the language of a less wealthy.

To Benjamin (1923) translation is a method and in order to comprehend it one must go back to the original language, because in his opinion the original language or the source language contains the law governing the translation: its translatability i.e. its ability to be translated. He goes on to describe his notion of “Translatability” that translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which does not imply that it is essential that they be translated; rather that a specific intrinsic worth in the original manifests itself in its translatability. It is likely that no translation, no matter how good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original. The original work has worth of its own as it is the language in which it is conceived by the author and

its translation comes later on. To endorse the translation of original as its continued life, by virtue of its translatability, would not be wrong.

Translations can be divided into different types depending upon their functions. As Nida (1964) mentions that differences in translations can generally be accounted for by three basic reasons in translating and that may include firstly the nature of the message that is to say what is the content of the text and what is such importance in it that it requires to be translated .Secondly what is the purpose or purposes of the author and at the same time of the translator. The purpose can be persuasive instructive or argumentative .One very important factor is the type of audience that is for whom the translation has to be done. The two approaches to translation according to Nida are: Formal equivalence that implies word for word translation or literal translation. It translates not only the exact appearance of vocabulary but also the idioms and grammatical structure used in the original. The drawback of formal equivalence is that idioms or phrases can mislead or confuse the reader. And dynamic equivalence, also referred to as functional equivalence, implies the essential thought expressed in the source text. It is not following a word for word translation but changing, adding, or subtracting from the original text to make it look as the translator sees suitable.

Mentioning the qualities of good translated work Goodspeed (1945:8) says:

“The best translation is not one that keeps forever before the reader’s mind the fact that this is a translation, not an original English composition, but one that makes the reader forget that it is a translation at all and makes him feel that he is looking into the ancient writer’s mind, as he would into that of a contemporary. This is, indeed, no light matter to undertake or to execute, but it is, nevertheless, the task of any serious translator.” (Cited in Principles of Correspondence)

J.B. Phillips (1953:53) goes on to emphasize the same point when he mentions: confirms the same viewpoint when he declares that: “The test of a real translation is that it should not read like translation at all.” (Cited in Principles of Correspondence)

Talking about the position of translated work in literary world Even- Zohar (1978) came up with various assumptions of translated works' contribution in target language literature. In his opinion it can add to target language literature when the literature is young and it benefits from other literatures and likewise translated literature become important system of the literature. The same holds true for relatively established literature that is not very rich in literary hierarchy of wherein translated literature can contribute to literature. One more way of contribution may be due to changing times when literature is in need of new trends that can be added by translated literature.

In addition to adding to literature, translation impacts culture as well. Toury (1978) opines that translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions, i.e., at least two sets of norm-systems on each level. Thus, its importance may be described as consisting of two major elements:

First, being a text in a certain language, and hence occupying a position in the appropriate culture, and thereby constituting a representation in that language/culture of another, at the same time preexisting text in some other language, belonging to some other culture and occupying definite position within it. So in original text it is the part of one culture and language but in its translated form becomes part of the other culture and language. In a way it can add to and at the same time adopt from the target language and its culture.

Different theorists have devised different yardsticks, with which they evaluate a translated work; as Venuti (1992) goes on to describe the evaluative technique of most editors, publishers, reviewers and translators themselves lies in the fact that it should appear as if it is original and it may appear as natural that the reader may find it part of the target language literature.

### **3 Method and Procedure of the Study**

The chapter deals with the method and procedure of the study.

#### **3.1 Design of the Study**

The study is analytical in nature. It aims to look at the aspects that confirm re birth of literature in translation as depicted in the translated version of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novella/short story Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate

Re-birth of Literature in Translation

“No One Writes to the Colonel”. Qualitative Content Analysis Technique was applied for the analysis of the data.

### **3.2 Population of the Study and Delimitation**

Population of the study was all the translated versions of novels and short stories by Latin American writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The study had been delimited to only one work of his i.e “No One Writes to the Colonel”.

### **3.3 Analysis of the Data**

The analytical content analysis of the data had been performed. In this regard the said work was studied to look for if a work gets a new birth in translation or not. The work was analyzed in the light of themes and what aspects contribute in its revival in translation. According to Venuti(1992) a translated work can be judged if it appears natural to the readers or not. Keeping this framework of Venuti the said work was given to some readers and their impressions after reading were collected. The data analysis is presented in Chapter No.4. The study began with identification of the objectives in the light of which research questions were formulated. The data was analyzed to seek answers to the research Questions. The findings were achieved and conclusions were drawn.

## **4 Data Analysis**

### **4.1 Brief Synopsis**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a Colombian novelist, short-story writer, screenwriter and journalist. He is considered as one of the most significant authors of the 20th century. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982. Among his notable works include *One Hundred Year of Solitude* ,*No One Writes to the Colonel*, *Big Mama’s Funeral* etc. The works of Marquez are marked for realism.

The novella “No One Writes to the Colonel” was written somewhere in between 1956-1957 and first published in 1961. It has been translated from Spanish into English by J.S. Bernstein. It is the story of an impoverished, retired colonel, a veteran of the Thousand Days War, who still hopes to receive the pension he was promised some fifteen years earlier. The Colonel lives with his asthmatic wife in a small village under martial law. The action opens with the colonel preparing to go to the funeral of a town musician whose death is notable because he was the first to die from natural causes in many years. The main characters of the novel are not named, adding to the feeling of insignificance of an individual living in Colombia. The Colonel and his wife, who have lost their son to political authoritarianism, are struggling with poverty and financial instability. The corruption of the local and national officials is evident and this is the topic that Garcia Marquez explores throughout the novel, by using references to censorship and the impact of government on society. The Colonel desperately tries to sell the inheritance from their only son who is now dead and eventually the only reminder of his existence is a rooster that the colonel trains to take part in a cockfight.

#### **4.2 Translation as Re-birth**

Though the work is a translated work but it has some remarkable features of its own that lend it a revival after being translated. It is an acclaimed fact that whenever a piece of literature is translated into another language it gets a new birth, as it translated into a different language and gets new readers who approach this work in many diverse ways from its source language. If taken into account translated version of “No One Writes to the Colonel”, it can be inferred that it gets a rebirth when translated from Spanish into English depending upon many factors. The foremost being, that English is the widely spoken and written language in the world. So when the said work is converted into English its readership increased manifold. To me it’s a very interesting fact to share that though I am not familiar with Spanish language at all and did not have any information about Latin American writers but I found the said work in a small bookshop of my hometown Abbottabad, which itself is a small city of KPK(Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). To me this was something very surprising to see a writer from Latin America who writes in Spanish but his book was found in a small city of another country: since it was translated into English so many other people from my city would have got to know about Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate  
Re-birth of Literature in Translation

Gabriel Garcia Marquez that otherwise would not have been possible if it had been in its original language i.e., Spanish. The translation in this regard has attributed to rebirth of the original work as its readership increased and it became accessible to many people who were not familiar to Spanish.

#### **4.2 Realistic Treatment of the Themes**

The said work is said to be a masterpiece of Spanish language, in which Marquez has tried to highlight the trauma of human life in a very realistic manner. The story centers on the life of an elderly Colonel who is living with his ill wife and they have lost their only son in an incident. It is about the plight of the old man who is at the mercy of corrupt government officials to get his pension and is waiting for more than fifteen years to get his right that he is deprived off. The story reveals the miseries of the life of the couple. The said issues had been portrayed realistically in the translated version as well. The translated version is replete with such wonderful descriptions which render a subtle beauty of reality to it. The very beginning brings forth the fact that it is not a fairy tale rather the story of ordinary human beings for whom to meet both ends is no less than a Herculean task, those who can't afford to have a full cup of coffee, *"and scraped the inside of the can with a knife until the last scrapings of the ground coffee, mixed with bits of rust..."* (Marquez:3). At one place the description of the poverty stricken house of Colonel is illustrated as: *"They lived at the edge of town, in a house with a palm-thatched roof and walls whose whitewash was flaking off"* (Marquez: 7). But the poverty has not over taken their self respect and they are there to face their fate, as at one more place the poverty of the family as marked against the self respect is depicted in a very miserable way, *"Several time I've had to put stones on to boil so the neighbors wouldn't know that we often go for many days without putting on the pot."* (Marquez: 41) And for Marquez the crux of it is nothing just that *Life is tough*.

The horrors of dictatorial rule are depicted remarkably that how during martial law the masses are under tyranny and can't move freely as there is curfew for certain duration, common people cannot pass by important places and offices even the funeral procession cannot pass in front of police barracks. Every activity is under censorship. Discussion of politics is not allowed. The

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate

Re-birth of Literature in Translation

newspapers are under scrutiny and they are not permitted to inform masses of the situation of the country rather they are talking about the happenings in Europe. It reminds one of our very own National T.V that talks much about the government good deeds and highlights the acts of violence taking place in neighboring countries and not exposing the realities of our own country.

The exploitation of the poor and noble people at the hands of businessmen giving rise to class difference in a society is also portrayed very convincingly where at one place Colonel while discussing his friend Sabas' richness who was once an ordinary medicine seller: *"There's my friend Sabas with a two-story house that isn't big enough to keep his money, a man who came to this town selling medicines with a snake curled around his neck."*(Marquez: 42).

#### **4.4 Acceptance among the Target Language Readers**

To me the work is appealing on the basis of many grounds and one such reason is as Venuti's index of evaluating a translated work that a translated work's fidelity is reckoned in the fact that if it appears natural to the reader and the reader cannot decipher it as a translated work but take it original. The same holds true to me when I first went through it, it became difficult to differentiate it as translated work. To further testify my this observation I gave said work to few students of Army Burn Hall College for Boys Abbottabad and COMSATS Institute of Information and Technology Abbottabad to read. They read the work without being informed that it was translated work. The title of the work did not have any reference about its being translation, it was only inside that it was mentioned on a page and that page was hidden intentionally to get their real impressions.

#### **4.5 Sincerity in Translated Work**

The very first impression that the selected readers had was that it was an original English work. The thing that made them maintain the interest was based on the fact that to them it was a story of someone around them, the characters seemed real. Their life was just like the life of anyone living in this part of the world, caught between the dilemmas of earning bread and butter. Their problems and sufferings seemed equally convincing. The events that take place in the course of the story were very much comparable to the ordinary life around us and many cultural

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate

Re-birth of Literature in Translation

similarities were observed. Like at one place the Colonel forbids small children to play music because of a death in the town: *“Don’t play that today... There’s been a death in town.”*(Marquez:5). This is something very similar in the culture of small towns here where the whole neighborhood is in the state of mourning in case of death somewhere nearby. Likewise the parents of the young dead man are in the state of mourning even after ten months of the death of the son and they refrain to go to movies being in state of sorrow, as Colonel mentions the right time to going movies in January as *“by the, Agustin’s year will be up and we can go to the movies.”* (Marquez: 28).

Reference to cockfights at one point in the novella shows that it an important part of their culture just like here. Common people face a ban on freedom of expression as they are not allowed to discuss politics. Strict censorship policies for print media as well as the performing arts exist there as it existed here during the times of martial law and under authoritarian form of government. One more very familiar image is that of the corrupt government officials who instead of facilitating the common people are busy in relaxing themselves and do not bother to perform their official duties properly. As Colonel is disgusted with the attitude of his lawyer who during office time is found stretched out lazily in a hammock. As a typical government official who has a good number of reasons for delay in work he goes on to justify it as administrative problem: *“The lawyer gave a very graphic description of the administrative ins and outs”*. (Marquez: 23)

As illustrated from the examples the work has so many references to our own culture that it makes reader spellbound and he/she is engrossed in the story, thinking it as one taken from our own surroundings. Moreover it is the realistic treatment of the subject matter that lends a subtle beauty to the story. Interestingly the same spirit had been maintained in the translated version too that is why I have been able to enjoy it and at the same time other readers could also enjoy it. Although the original work is in Spanish, but its translation in English made it readable to me and many others like me who otherwise could not have enjoyed it because of being unfamiliar to Spanish. Though translated in English the work seems originally belonging to English i.e. its target language.

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate

Re-birth of Literature in Translation

## 4.6 Universality

This status of originality can be contributed to many factors like its theme dealing with the predicament of ordinary human life and its true to life characterization and realism but one more factor that cannot be overlooked is its universality. No work of literature can stay for long in literary world if it is deprived of this quality of universality. It is the quality that transcends a piece of literature to eternity and it remains alive in the coming times. It is the presence of this universal element that a piece of literature is translated into other languages and it becomes a natural and original piece to the target language readers. In the same way Marquez' No One Writes to the Colonel is a piece of literature with universal appeal. The same aspect has been retained in translated version. The author's universal views give it a new life even in translated form. As at one place Colonel after facing the hardships of life is compelled to say: "*Life is tough, pal*" (Marquez: 31). And a very good comment upon the unpredictability of human life comes: "*The only thing that comes for sure is death*" (Marquez: 38)

## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary

The study was conducted to find out whether a piece of literature gets a new birth in translation or not. The translated version of Gabriel Garcia Marquez' "No One Writes to the Colonel" was taken for this study. The novella/short story was actually written in Spanish but translated to English by J.S. Bernstein. Keeping in mind this assumption, research objectives and questions were formulated. The content was analyzed in the light of framework provided by Venuti, according to which a translated work's fidelity is judged on the basis of its appearing original and natural to the readers.

### 5.2 Findings

In order to prove the notion of re birth in translation the said work was analyzed. In this regard, a careful reading was conducted to find out the elements of revival in the said work and it was inferred that the work underwent a new birth as it was transformed from Spanish into English; it was received by new audience, its readership increased many times. It was because of its being Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate

Re-birth of Literature in Translation

translated into English that it was even available in a bookshop of my hometown Abbottabad, a small city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, that otherwise would not have been possible had it been in Spanish alone. To further confirm or refute the idea, the work was given to few readers without being informed that it was a translated work and the readers enjoyed it thinking it English work because of its realism and universality.

### 5.3 Conclusion

The findings led to the conclusion that it is possible for a work of literature to get a new birth in translation depending upon the factor that it should be a work of elevated themes discussing universal problems, so that the readers of the target language may find it a story of their own, because human nature remains same and does not change with time and space. Like any other literary work that transcends limits of time and space because of its universality, translated work also surpasses the limits of time and space if it has a universal appeal.

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Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate

Re-birth of Literature in Translation

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Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 6 June 2012

Shaina Rauf Khan, M.A, M.Phil. Candidate

Re-birth of Literature in Translation